

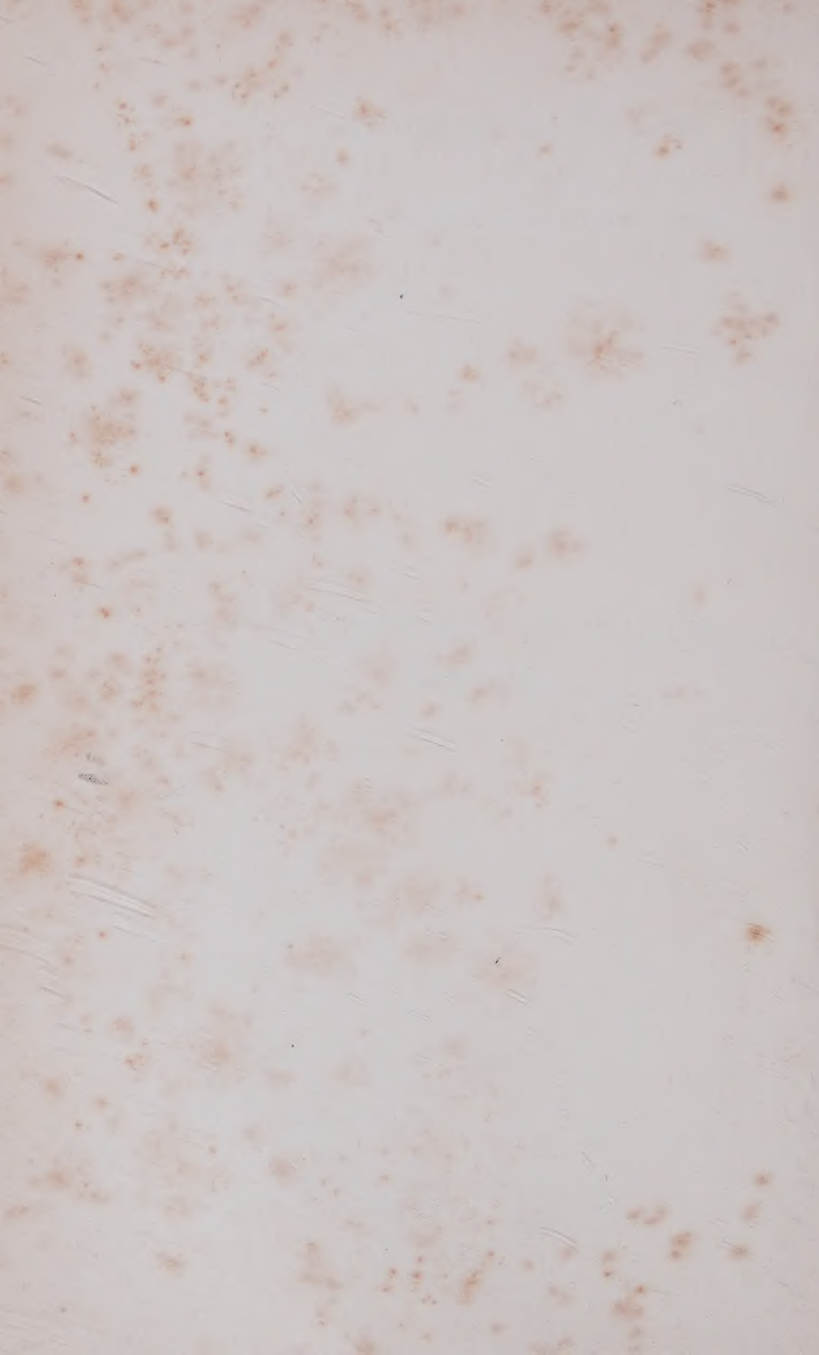
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DOES IT MATTER WHAT A MAN
BELIEVES?



DOES IT MATTER WHAT A MAN BELIEVES?

AND OTHER THEMES FOR THOUGHT

BY

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'GUILTY,' 'THE TRUE GOD,' 'CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS,' ETC.

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PREFACE

THE following studies on Christian themes, although they represent the substance of what has been said in the pulpit, are not called sermons, because real sermons cannot be printed. Sermons are, or ought to be, the living utterance of a thinking personality, throbbing with emotion, and vivid with an impressiveness derived from the whole situation such as can never be communicated in cold type. Nothing can ever take the place of the true preacher in religion, any more than that of the genuine orator in politics. Yet printed words may be better than none at all. They may at least be suggestive intellectually, and may by valid thought provoke worthy emotion, which again may take shape in action, and so contribute to noble character. If these pages shall in any degree lead to such development, and so help towards the production of that Christian character, which, when true to its great Exemplar, I hold to be the highest ideal possible to human nature, I shall be more than thankful.

They will probably be found too practical, too much given to harping upon the same string—even with intentional repetition—to please the critic who is in search of original thought or literary style. I am far from despising these excellences at proper times. But when

dealing with religious matters, in face of the pitiless severity of the fight of modern life, the unfairly small proportion of earth's good things which yet falls to the lot of the many, the tragic misuse of what they have and missing of what they might have by multitudes, as well as the abominations of wrong which still blast human society, the delights of literature appear to me too much like the Neronian performance on the lute when Rome was burning.

When the ideal of Christ is reached which views all men alike as the children of a Heavenly Father, and would have them treat each other accordingly; when all men are equally possessed of opportunity to make life worth living, and all who have opportunity are equally disposed to use it, then doubtless the wildernesses of human life will rejoice in the beauties of literature and art, and the slum deserts of civilization will bloom with appreciation of music and poetry.

Alas that that day should seem yet so far distant! The editor of *The Clarion* declares that it will never come except along the lines of Altruism. And he defines Altruism as 'Christ's glorious gospel of love, against man's dismal science of greed.' I accept the definition, and endorse the sentiment. The Christian name for that gracious consummation is 'the Kingdom of Heaven' on earth. Would that these pages might even in the smallest degree accelerate its coming!

F. B.

HARROGATE, 1908.

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I

DOES IT MATTER WHAT A MAN
BELIEVES?*Dost thou believe in the Son of God?*

JOHN ix. 35.

As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema.

GAL. i. 9.

We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

2 PET. i. 16.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

I JOHN iv. 1.

TO the question of Jesus as recorded above, these three firm utterances from the three greatest apostles supply an unmistakable answer. There is, however, no vengeful bigotry in Paul's anathema. It is much more of a plea than a threat. In all the strong words of the three strong personalities here quoted, there is always equal tenderness, and no warrant whatever for

the vindictive bitterness which has all too often since been associated with orthodox shibboleths. Paul's parting prediction at Miletus came true immediately. The 'grievous wolves' arose 'speaking perverse things,' and drew away not a few disciples after them. How soon and how far such early heresies developed, we have abundant witnesses in the letter to the Colossians, no less than in the first letter of the beloved disciple some years later.

Such early manifestations of Gnosticism and other departures from the Christian gospel were alike natural and prophetic. The restless activities of the human mind and innate tendencies of the heart, are not only exhibited in the history of all religions, but especially in relation to Christianity have increased rather than diminished from the apostolic age until now. The main difference between that time and this appears to be that the ancient Gnosticism has become the modern Agnosticism. Then human redemption was to come through superior knowledge, now through cultured content with ignorance. In that age the hope of humanity, in face of the great problems of being, was said to lie in the direction of the utmost possible acquaintance with the supernatural and occult. Now, our latest Bampton Lecturer tells us, 'we are oppressed by the dead weight of spiritual inertia, a wide-

spread and profound indifference to dogma as the guide and motive of action.'¹

The early Gnostic was little concerned to do, but he must know. The modern Agnostic is avowedly less concerned to know, all that is required is that men should do. Thus the 'idols' against which John so earnestly and tenderly warned his 'little children,' are very different for the twentieth century, although quite as real as those of the second.

There are, of course, as many varying kinds and degrees of the modern as of the ancient rejection of Christ's gospel. Continental extremes find many English echoes. Professor Haeckel's bold assertion that such notions as God, the soul, and immortality are but mischievous fictions, is flung as a pall over the country by a cheap Rationalist press, and blatantly endorsed by the most popular Socialistic newspaper. The Belgian Professor's dictum that 'man is as much an automaton as a tiger or a rock' and therefore utterly irresponsible,² that in fact 'moral responsibility is a superstition, it does not exist,' is fully echoed in this country by Mr. Cotter Morison, who informs us³ that the best thing for moral education is to 'get rid of the notion of moral

¹ *The Reproach of the Gospel*, Bampton Lectures for 1907, by Rev. J. H. F. Peile, p. 18.

² *The Illusion of Free Will*, A. Hamon, pp. 133-8.

³ *The Service of Man*, cheap edition, p. 111.

responsibility.' These ravings need not now concern us. They are sufficiently exposed elsewhere.¹

Milder developments of the modern spirit come nearer to the Christian standpoint and cast over it a more significant shadow. Sometimes this takes the form of a 'plea for a simpler faith.' Sometimes it offers itself as a reverent representation of 'natural religion.' At other times it is most seriously concerned only to get rid of the 'supernatural husk' of Christianity, and put us in possession of the ethical and spiritual kernel. Most recently of all it appears under the guise of 'The New Theology,' which, we are told, is to conserve for the Christian faith all who are imbued with modern critical and scientific knowledge.

But all these varieties tend in the same direction. Their call is to minimize to the uttermost, if not wholly to eliminate from the Christian gospel, the presence and influence of the supernatural. Definite doctrine is to be whittled away in the name of religion, until really all that is left is an indescribable agglomeration of pious nebulosities. The sincerity of the process need not be questioned. But its truth and wisdom are matters for further consideration. Its result, certainly, is to reduce to vanishing quantities all those conceptions which

¹ See *Haeckel's Monism False* ; also *Guilty*, a reply to Mr. Blatchford's *Not Guilty*—by the present writer.

have hitherto been considered fundamental to Christian belief. The doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the credibility of miracles, the inspiration of the Bible, the vicarious atonement of Jesus, the personal work of the Holy Spirit, the actuality and guiltiness of sin, with its consequences now and hereafter—these all are more or less sweepingly dismissed as either untrue or insignificant. God, as the immanent Power of the universe ; Christ, as a man essentially indistinguishable from other men ; a human brotherhood independent of any divine Fatherhood ; a social amelioration which ignores the spiritual realm as completely as it insists upon the physical and intellectual needs of humanity ; a scientific morality which takes no more account of God than of a future life beyond the grave,—these constitute the general attitude of the modern man who proclaims his desire to be religious whilst avowing himself driven to be an Agnostic or a Rationalist.

His exclusive right, however, to clothe himself in these appellations, cannot for a moment be conceded. Yet such names soon become technical terms, and their significance is much vaster than Christian churches as a rule acknowledge. Their prevalence in speech, together with their confirmation in the character and conduct of myriads, at least suffice to show how pitifully mistaken is the

pious fiction that doubt as to Christian essentials is promulgated from pulpit attempts to deal with it. The plain facts which confront every honest observer of the religious world to-day, in this regard, may be thus summarized. Within the pale of avowed Christendom there are many and great differences of theological opinion, amounting in some cases to flat mutual contradiction. Outside the churches, in what is technically called the world, there is a very real and vast amount of goodness which is as undeniable as non-theological. There is, furthermore, ample room for criticism in ordinary church life, both intellectually and practically, and the history no less than the general behaviour of clericalism is bad. Consequently, there is a growing disposition on the part of increasing numbers to desire goodness without religion, and religion without theology. This tendency takes shape, with ever augmenting emphasis, in the question we here propose to consider. How can it really matter what a man believes, so long as his life and character are good? Poetry comes in to embellish Darwin's suggestion that 'man can do his duty without God.'

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Of what use, therefore, are discussions about doctrine? And how does it matter what churches

teach, so long as they are philanthropic and practically helpful? Why may not a man as well belong to one church as to another, or indeed to no church at all, so long as he is an upright citizen, a faithful husband, a tender father, an earnest worker for the benefit of others? Such questions can neither be suppressed nor evaded. Nor can they be truthfully answered in a few words. Hence it may be well worth while, from the Christian standpoint, to lay down the main principles on which all such inquiries must be met.

The first step towards truth and wisdom herein must be to bring out into clearer view the suppressed personal reference. If definite belief matters at all, it does so to some personality. To inanimate nature, or the universe at large, it cannot make the least difference whether we are Christians, or Jews, or Secularists. To whom, then, does it matter what we believe? To God? Or to our fellow men? Or to the man himself?

To the inquiry, 'Does it matter to God what I believe?'—there cannot but be two answers, negative and affirmative. All depends upon the nature of our thought of God. Dismissing Pantheism, Agnosticism, and Deism, as here equivalent to Atheism, the personality of God has yet two values for the thoughtful mind. With the ancient seer whose awe-struck appreciation of

nature has come down to us in the book of Job, we may think first of the divine majesty. In that case we shall be driven to echo with added emphasis, proportioned to our greater knowledge of the universe, what he so deeply felt :

Look unto the heavens and see ; and behold the skies
which are higher than thou.

If thou hast sinned, what doest thou against Him ?

And if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou
unto Him ?

If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him ?

Or what receiveth He at thy hand ?

Thy wickedness may hurt a man such as thou art ; and
thy righteousness may profit a son of man.¹

It is in very deed but a pitiful and foolish conceit, sometimes we know associated with lurid tragedy, when certain sections of believers arrogantly assume that the great God of the universe cares only for their particular ritual, or is reached only by the 'open sesame' of their especial shibboleth. Alas, it must be confessed that such bigotry is only too vividly illustrated by what the Christian Church has deliberately asserted in this respect. To think that in the name of the Christ of the Gospels it should ever have been declared that if any man does not think of the Godhead in the precise way specified by the so-called 'Athanasian' creed—'without doubt he shall perish everlastingly'—is a sheer blasphemy whose

¹ Job xxxv. 5-8.

revolting horror can never be expressed in words. Neither the Anglican nor any Church on earth can possibly be justified in thrusting such a monstrosity upon a worshipping congregation. Whilst, however, the Free Churches of this land are delivered from this nightmare, they are by no means free from another cognate misrepresentation. There yet lingers in not a few quarters a considerable amount of inclination to make orthodoxy—as evangelically conceived—necessary to salvation, both here and hereafter. This is more serious even than the Romish and Anglican assumption. For the latter, except in a very few cases not worthy of notice, applies simply to being in the true Church, whereas the former suggests exclusion from the love of God, both in the present and the future. It is time that this heresy of heresies was utterly extinguished. Never too plainly can it be said that mere accuracy of creed—supposing such to be possible—can no more recommend a man to the infinite God, than mistaken belief can involve hopeless condemnation. All such notions are but indications that the transcendent greatness of God has been forgotten. As well might we think the sun affected by the dashing of our earth's ocean spray, as believe the divine majesty to be concerned for the exact opinion of some poor little biped on this tiny planet.

But it would be rushing to the other extreme to

represent God as gazing with Sphinx-like unconcern upon creatures whom He has Himself endowed with the intellectual powers and moral faculties whereby He may be both known and loved. So long as we give any heed to Christ's word, we cannot but regard the whole revelation of God in the Bible as culminating in the assurance of the divine Fatherhood. Of that, our human fatherhood is at best but a poor pale copy. Yet what father is there amongst us who could see his child go right or wrong without concern? Even so, but with larger emphasis than our thought can formulate, are we compelled by Christ's gospel to think of God our Father as yearning over men with an inexpressible desire that each, according to his own capacity, should know and love and obey the truth, and nothing less than the truth. In that sense, therefore, it matters most really to God what a man believes.

Assuredly also it matters to his fellow men. For all his relations with them are necessarily affected by what he believes. Leaving mere superficial profession out of account, a man's inner world is ever the source of his dealings with the outer world. The relation between creed and conduct is direct and unmistakable. The illustrations of this are equally bright and dark. All history, as well as observation both near and far,

confirms the principle that a hard, narrow, gloomy creed makes the man who holds it a cruel fanatic; whilst a bright, broad, noble belief, leads him into corresponding treatment of his fellows. There is no room for doubt that the perpetrators of the unutterable atrocities of the Romish Inquisition and St. Bartholomew's massacre, were sincere believers. So too in other lands were the Thugs, who thought that every victim treacherously strangled approved them to their deity. The dull and harsh severity which seriously marred the nobility of the Puritan character, plainly sprang from their sincere conception of God, which in turn depended upon their belief concerning the inspiration of the Bible. But it is quite unnecessary to multiply examples. Everywhere and always conduct is but the expression of character, and character is the result of conviction. Nothing can contribute more to the weal or woe of human society, therefore, than the spread of a high or low, good or bad, worthy or unworthy belief.

For the condition of human society at any time is neither more nor less than the total result of each individual's contribution to it. This is but the communication to others of the effects wrought upon himself by his beliefs. To ask whether it matters to him what he believes, is as unnecessary an inquiry as whether it matters to his body what he eats or drinks. If character matters anything,

belief matters everything. Character, indeed, is doubly dependent upon belief. Real belief, when ratified by persistence, becomes settled conviction. But such conviction develops character first in the will to believe required for its very formation, and then also in the further will to act in accordance with the conviction. So that it may be truly said, no conviction no character. And that is synonymous with bad character. A characterless man is always a plague to his friends, no less than a peril to all who meet with him. Granted that ordinary human beings are naturally energetic, so that they must act in some way, each man becomes not only a centre of force but a possible focus of confusion. If, however, on one of our great battleships confusion reigned supreme, it is certain that in the day of conflict that vessel would be a greater cause for alarm than for hope to its surroundings. The confusion within would be pitiful enough, but it would no less work havoc without.

Misguided, that is unguided, power, works ever this double ruin. The mischief wrought by the fanatic, the misery brought about by the full-blown bigot, the gloomy pessimism diffused by the man with narrow and distorted convictions, have all their preceding counterpart in the darkened mind and shadowed heart whence such emanations flow.

So far, therefore, as human relations are con-

cerned, it would be difficult to find in all our life or in all society, anything that mattered as much as belief does. Of what avail, indeed, is it that man should have all the self-controlling powers of a moral being—like an ocean liner with the latest engines—if there be no trustworthy guidance? Can the most experienced commander navigate his vessel without chart or compass? If the latter be unreliable, or the former mistaken, what but shipwreck can ensue? Yet however serious such a consideration may be for the individual man, it is plainly much more so for the Christian Church. The Church, we know, is an aggregate of human units, but these cannot be said to be merely added together under such influences. Rather is it true that energy and power for good or ill are multiplied, whenever men are thus closely associated. Hence it is a matter of far greater moment what the Church believes, because from that belief not only does its own character result, but a conjoined, energetic, and authoritative influence such as no individual can ever wield.

This potency of association is so manifest, that out of it, from the very beginning, sprang the necessity for dogma. No ecclesiastical fanatic was ever so blind as to imagine that assemblies could create truth, or make true what was really in itself not true. But it was recognized, and will be whilst human nature lasts, that vast influence,

even if not legal authority, does attach to the joint judgement of the many. The politician has to reckon with the maxim *vox populi vox dei*, and the history of religion has supplied the parallel in its *vox ecclesiae, vox dei*. But whatever objections may be raised against the note of authority associated with dogma, none ought to lie against the attempt at the clear expression of truth which in all dogma precedes the suggestion of authority. It was thus that all the early Christian heresies were real benedictions, viz. that they compelled thought. Whether we think of the Gnostics, or Sabellians, or Patripassians, or Arians, or Pelagians, they were all of service in helping to bring out the truth into a carefulness and clearness of expression which otherwise would never have been attained. Hence, in our own day also, the ordinary revolt against dogma is mere insensate prejudice. There can be no rational objection to any attempt to ascertain and state the truth. 'We search for truth,' is the cry of every anti-Christian party. But when they think that they have found it, they can no more state it without the embodiment of dogma, than any ancient Council or modern Congress. Thus the title of a leading article recently in a well-known religious journal—'The Doom of Dogma and the Dawn of Truth'—was really nothing more than a popular catch-penny of alliteration. There is no more contradiction between dogma

and truth, than there is between any vessel and the liquid it contains. The only rational ground for fearing dogma is that its vision of the truth should be mistaken. Confusion and ambiguity are certainly no better in religion than in science. The fact that ecclesiasticism has often sought to enforce, even with tyranny, what it believes to be true, is indeed a moral accident against which we must defend ourselves, but it does not justify the sweeping denunciations of dogma which have of late years become so fashionable.

The modern cry for an undogmatic faith is, when carefully considered, simply a demand for the useless and impossible. It is as impossible as the demand for an unorganized human body. To the child eye, certainly, the body may be nothing more than a mass of fleshy pulp. But the man in the street is physiologist enough to know better. The lady of fashion may still think it the proper thing to become semi-hysterical at the sight of a human skeleton. But it is pitifully absurd ; seeing that not only is she herself a clothed skeleton, but all the costly outer attire which constitutes the joy of her life, is but a poor and paltry blend of rags, compared with the marvellous and beautifully ordered arrangement of more than two hundred bones, with twice that number of muscles and tendons, by means of which alone she can display her costume or enter upon her

dance. Thus too the neo-theologian who affects to despise dogma, contradicts himself every time that he shakes hands with a friend. For assuredly the grip of a boneless hand would not be more useless for the expression of friendship, than is the emotional reiteration of a gospel of theological nebulosity to reach and save human nature. The difference between life and death is really the presence or absence of organization. Even protoplasm is something more than mere vital slime. If it were not structure it would not be life. But in all higher organisms it is plain before our eyes, that the nobler life always demands more definite arrangement of distinct organs. No vertebrate life is associated with a mere haphazard heap of flesh and blood.

Yet in the highest realm of all, which for want of better terms we call the mind, the soul, with all its relations to its environment, we are bidden be content with the indefinite and unorganized. So long as a man is sincere, we are asked, what does he want with dogma? If only religion be real, commit theology to the flames, and brand theologians as the enemies of the race! But it is ever necessary to remember that theology is at least the inevitable skeleton of religion, and dogma the essential organization of belief. Seeing that without theology of some kind, religion is impossible, common sense alone would suggest that theology

should both be, and be of the best. Furthermore, since belief without dogma is little more than evanescent emotion, it becomes a case of a dogmatic faith, to some real extent, or none at all. Dr. A. M. Fairbairn has well said, that, whilst the Jesus of the Gospels is the initial charm, that charm would never have survived had it not been for the dogmatic faith.

Assuredly the wholly undogmatic faith is useless for Christian purposes. When we ask, 'What are churches for?' we cannot quote the Master's reply—'the salt of the earth, and the light of the world'—without being reminded in these scientific days that both chemistry and optics are as dogmatic in their definition of the 'light' and 'salt' here used as figures, as ever the Council of Trent could be about doctrine. It is, we know, now urged that religiously we should be content with the ethics of the gospel. But what are these gospel ethics? Do they simply stand for the practice of the true, and the good, as Seneca or Jeremiah understood them? In other words, is there, or is there not, anything distinctive about Christian ethics? Christ said, beyond all possibility of misunderstanding, that there was. 'If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? If ye salute your brethren only, what extra do ye? do not even the Gentiles the same?' If Christianity be anything more than a delusion, its ethic involves what Professor Seeley

rightly described as 'that higher-toned goodness which we call holiness.' When this ideal is derived, not from the Sermon on the Mount alone, but from the whole portrayal of the New Testament, we get indeed an ethic which is distinct from all other, but is exceeded by none.¹ It is supernatural, truly, for it is beyond the natural, alike in the individual and in society. That is why, on the large scale, Christianity has never yet been tried. Will it ever be? We have overwhelming as well as tragic evidence, both within and without the pale of Christendom, that ordinary morality, whether merely non-Christian or anti-Christian, is insufficient. Witness the sins and sorrows, the injustice and tyranny, the utterly unjustifiable inequalities and immeasurable selfishnesses of human society at the beginning of this twentieth century. The Christian ethic, if embodied in men and women, would end all these. But how is that ever to come to pass? Whence the dynamic which shall make possible the ideal? Can it be truthfully expressed in any better language than that of Paul—'I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me'? But in the

¹ 'For verily I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye will in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'—MATT. v. 20.

'With reference to all that bears upon the love of God and of our neighbour, upon purity of heart and upon the individual life, nothing can be added to the moral intuition which Jesus Christ has left us.'—Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, popular edition, 1864, p. 625.

degree in which that is true, it is dogmatic. Only the theological, i.e. the supernatural, Christ can possibly be that which the apostle claims He is. The rapid motion of the cars along our streets through contact with a wire conveying no electric current, would be quite as reasonable and scientific a suggestion as the fulfilment in heart and life of the supernatural ideal of the Christian ethic through mere pious subjectivity, or through dependence on a nebulous mirage of the New Testament Christ. The ethics of John's first letter would transform the world, if obeyed. But they are absolutely inseparable from the dogmatic faith. 'We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' Take that away from John's ethics, and what is left? As much as is left when the wires are taken away through which the electric current flows, or the apparatus by means of which alone Marconigrams are possible. When the beloved disciple wrote the closing words—'my little children, guard yourselves from idols,' he may have had in view the mischievously dogmatic Gnostics, or Nicolaitans. But the undogmatic ethicism or anti-dogmatic Agnosticism of to-day is no less an idol of the schools, fatal in either case to Christian faith, and

therefore destructive of the highest ethical ideal and the only sufficient ethical hope the world has ever seen.

After such suggestions as the above, it is inevitable that certain questions should in these days arise. Without attempting exhaustive answer, they may here be stated and briefly estimated.

1. Dogma may be necessary to Christian faith, but is there not now good cause, in modern knowledge, to deny the great foundations upon which Christian dogmas are founded? Plainly and deliberately, in reply, we may say, No! there is not. It may be freely acknowledged that to make a doctrine clear, or even emphatic, does not make it true. But when it is boldly asked, Has not science disproved the supernatural and discredited miracle?—has not criticism mutilated the Gospels and dispelled the historic Christ?—has not ‘deterministic’ philosophy shown sin to be impossible, and therefore holiness a myth?—we answer, with equal boldness, Certainly not. Assertion must be met by counter-assertion. No one of these assumptions is warranted. For detailed proof of this, the reader must turn elsewhere. But the historic situation cannot be better expressed than in the competent words of Dr. Sanday :

‘The furnace has certainly been heated seven times over, and yet this group of facts, the common matter of the Synoptic Gospels, remains

substantially unscathed. Doubts may be raised, but they will never permanently hold their ground. We have, then, I cannot but think, in the criticism of these men an irreducible minimum. And that minimum, I must needs think, is an Archimedean point; grant us so much, and we shall recover what ought to be recovered, in time.' ¹

Moreover, as regards the general relation of the natural to the supernatural, how far modern science is from warranting the would-be iconoclasm of some anti-Christian pamphleteers, is made plain in the writings of Sir Oliver Lodge, who has well earned the right to be regarded as the competent exponent of the philosophy of faith from the scientific standpoint.

2. But what about all the difficulties and differences of belief as exhibited in history, and just now especially in the publications of the New Theology? This—in the wise words of the scientist just mentioned—

‘Facile belief is of but little value; it often only means that as certain words make no impression whatever upon the mind, so they excite no opposition in it. There are few things which Christ would have visited with sterner censure than that short cut to belief which consists of abandonment of mental effort.’ ²

¹ See Mr. Peile's *Bampton Lectures* for 1907, p. 25.

² Introduction to *Ecce Homo*, by Sir Oliver Lodge, in Everyman's Library.

The motives which actuate those who arrive at different theological conclusions, and the sincerity of their efforts after truth, must be left always to the judgement of God. But for the substance of faith, the New Testament gives sufficient standard. The belief that costs nothing is worth nothing, in all who have reached adult years. Uniformity of thought is neither necessary to Christian reality, nor is it religiously desirable. Differences in conception and in judgement may be unmeasured benediction, intellectually ; whilst spiritually, ' The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control '—and all these may be grown, confessedly, from very varying theologies. Where such fruit, indeed, results, differences of theological opinion will do no Christian harm. The plainest principle of all is that whoever is most firmly persuaded that he has the surest truth, is most of all bound to exhibit the purest, highest, and noblest character.

3. What then about the education of the children ? This ; that in so far as either a man—or a church—provides it for his own children, he has both the perfect right and the solemn duty to teach his own most cherished convictions. If he has no convictions of his own, then he can raise no rational objection against any teacher impressing the mind of the child with *his* convictions.

But, however strongly and conscientiously a parent may himself believe, he has no right to expect all other parents to think and believe the same; or, believing otherwise, to submit their children to his standard. In public education relative to religion, if parents and teachers cannot agree upon a compromise, nothing is left but that the State should enforce the intellectual and moral elements, and leave the religious and spiritual to the parents and the churches.

4. But how, after all, can a man—or a church—know that his definite belief is the truth, as distinct from other more or less false beliefs? This is, of course, the final question. Its importance merits most careful reply.

(i) An infallible monopoly of the truth, in religion as in anything else, is utterly out of the question. The only church that claims infallibility, is the church most demonstrably and egregiously mistaken. Rome's recent denunciation of 'modernism,' alike in its form and its contents, is but a pitiful instance of self-stultification, and a prophecy of coming nemesis. That one human mind, or set of minds, in any age, should so grasp all the truth in regard to the great foundations and contents of Christian faith, as equally to exclude mistake and any other view, is as intellectually impossible as it is spiritually unnecessary.

(ii) Yet each man may strive earnestly for the

truth, so far as he is able to grasp it. He may not only use conscientiously all the opportunities that come to him, but he may make many more, in these days of abounding literary helps. Here, much rather than in the costless acquisition of infallible conceptions, is scope both for the exhibition and the development of moral character.

(iii) But this would make every man his own theologian! Yes, and not only is such the only theology worth holding, but it is, in point of fact, what is always taking place, albeit in crude and unconscious forms. Every man who has any religion or no religion, if he be other than animal or lunatic, must have some reason for his attitude. His very decision to accept without further ado the ecclesiastical *ipse dixit* of another, is itself an act of judgement. In all real belief we can no more share convictions than spines. As, in regard to the body, every man must take his own food, if he is to live, so does any and every degree of the higher life of religion in the soul demand the exercise of his own thought and the action of his own will. Real belief, as distinct from the mere echo of easy-going conventions, is no more possible by proxy than eating or drinking.

(iv) Yet there may be and must be, in religion as in all else, both teaching and learning, both experts and tyros. Philip's question addressed to the eunuch, and its answer, were not only

eminently reasonable but timeless. It is even more necessary now than then, to ask for understanding, and to acknowledge the need of guidance. Christian churches can never discharge their duty to the world by being merely associations for philanthropy, or opportunities for worship; still less by constituting social clubs just tinged with religiousness. If only the chief officials of every church were truly qualified to teach, and employed in their teaching—as men in business or in science are compelled to do—all the latest and best means and methods, every Sunday would afford unlimited opportunity for helping the men of this generation to obtain that true knowledge of Christian verities which lies necessarily at the basis of all valid beliefs.

(v) This does not, however, mean that by such means all men would be or ought to be brought to hold the same views, or endorse the same creed. Uniformity in belief is no more needed or desirable in the Kingdom of Heaven than is similarity in the realm of nature. The laws of biology may indeed everywhere hold good. But the rose is no more wonderful or true an embodiment of them than the daisy. The notion that to be genuinely Christian, men must all hold the same views, experience the same feelings, adopt the same phrases in speech and ritual in worship, render the same kind of service to society, and belong to one church which

shall provide all these to pattern, is but one of the many small and pitiful conceits of human piety. There is no more warrant for it in the New Testament, than there is for uniformity in the aspect of a fair landscape. Christ's own words and deeds are plain enough to this effect, as also are all the acts and writings of the apostles.

It is one of the many strange things in the history of religion, that good men have so often denied to God and the gospel the vital liberty they themselves enjoy. Any man who is a father may be left to say whether he would have his children all hammered into one form of face and capacity and temperament, or exhibit the reality of their loving service in many ways through differing idiosyncrasies. The truly Christian ideal, at least, is plain enough, even as expressed in apostolic words. 'Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal.' There is thus no more need than there is possibility that the Universal Church of the future should embody uniformity. There is no more Christian room for lamentation over 'Dissent,' than there is to pray that all Unitarians may be transformed into Romanists. Sincere

thinkers on Christian matters may and must ever differ in proportion to the honesty and intensity of their thought. But the assurance of the Good Shepherd embraces them all. Even if it be true that some are nearer to ultimate truth than others, yet He Himself bars out all bigotry for ever when He declares that 'other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock,¹ one shepherd.' Let no man, therefore, vex his soul because he cannot think or see or feel as his neighbour does, no matter to what church or sect he may belong. If he be but true to the truest he can find, he may be as assured of the sympathy and approval of the living Christ, as if he were the very embodiment of all that the church, with even the best of reasons, has ever termed 'orthodox.'

(vi) Is there then no final and decisive proof as to what is objectively and exclusively true in Christian doctrine? No, there is not. Intellectually, there is no single view of absolute truth so exclusive of all else that a man or a church may seize upon it and proclaim all who differ from them deluded. Every colour that flashes

¹ Not 'one fold,' as the version of 1611 has all too long suggested. How an educated man like Lord Halifax can be content to quote it on behalf of Anglicanism, remains one of those vagaries of good men which must be left to the Master's judgement.

from the diamond is true to the nature of the gem. But no one of them is the whole truth. The facet that meets the eye tells its own true tale, but every facet, because it is true to itself, flashes forth its own hue, and the true estimate of worth is only to be found in the recognition and appreciation of all, with all their differences. Assuredly the whole truth concerning God as revealed in Jesus Christ, is faceted in too many precious ways for any one human soul, or any association of believers, to monopolize it all and leave others in the utter dark.

There are really but two tests that can be said to be final, and these are spiritual and practical rather than intellectual—viz. the believer's experience in his own invisible soul, and his influence on others by means of his visible conduct. These constitute the final court of appeal as to whether he is right or wrong in believing. Be his creed ever so correct, if it yields him within no comfort in his sorrows, no inspiration in his struggle for the highest, no guidance in his perplexities, no motive power towards the attainment of his ideals, no hope when the final darkness that cannot be dispelled settles down upon him, it cannot but be inferred, in face of Christ's own assurances, that there is some mistake somewhere. Either his orthodoxy or his heterodoxy has led him astray. So, too, if Professor Seeley's indictment

were true,¹ and orthodox faith did unite men in a gloomy conspiracy of misanthropy—whether now practically, or theoretically as to the hereafter—then there would certainly be something wrong. True following of the Light of the World cannot make any man a child of darkness to his fellows. He who says, ‘I love God,’ and fails to love his brother, has been pronounced by the tenderest of apostles, ‘a liar.’ Let words and creeds say what they will, the believer whose belief makes him narrow-minded and shallow-hearted, harsh and cynical, mean and selfish, towards his fellow men, or that fails to prevent his being these in daily life, is at the very least woefully mistaken. Such belief is no less plainly rejected of God than it is rightfully scorned of men.

In a word, then, truth for truth’s sake is to be followed to the uttermost, both because we are human and because we need the divine. But the divine is so unlimited, and our human faculties are so limited, that in the greatest of all quests there is most room for humility in ourselves and for charity towards others. When all the best and utmost possible to us is done in seeking for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, then the final and sufficient test of the success or failure of our soul’s endeavour is to be

¹ *Ecce Homo*, Eversley Edition, p. 191.

found in the character of the light which is created within, and the measure of the love radiated without. For as in every lamp with which we illumine night we are virtually borrowing from the sun, and truly even if infinitesimally reproducing its light and heat, so really and only in the enlightenment which both inspires to the highest within and diffuses warmth without, can we be sure that we are in touch with God who is both 'light' and 'love.'

II

THE BENEDICTION OF DIFFICULTY

Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. ACTS xiv. 22.

Reckon it nothing but joy, my brethren, whenever you find yourselves hedged in by various trials. . . . Blessed is he who patiently endures trials. JAS. i. 2, 12 (Weymouth).

All discipline indeed seems at the time to be not a matter of joy but of grief, yet afterwards it brings as a result, to those who have thereby been thoroughly developed, the peace which belongs to noble character. HEB. xii. 11.

THE two latter of the above passages, like many others, have been all too long marred by the rendering of the Old Version. And the Revised Version, in spite of its general superiority, here fails also. In the verses quoted from James's letter there is no more warrant for the modern employment of the word 'temptation' than there is in the Lord's Prayer. Centuries ago it might pass, bearing as it then did simply the significance of the Latin *tentatio*, of which it is the equivalent. In Gen. xxii. 1, the revisers have corrected its present-day misleading sense. Here, as in Christ's pattern of prayer, they sacrificed the truth to old association, and apologized by putting the true

word into the margin. Such a procedure brings no more gain to real religion than the clinging to old-fashioned medicines would to bodily health. The English reader can see for himself from verses 13 and 14 that the modern word 'temptation,' which now unquestionably and unalterably means inducement to evil, is ruled out of both cases alike. Similarly the retention of the term 'chastening,' however religious its association, is scarcely less mischievous in suggesting that only punishment is signified, whereas the Greek word stands for the training of youth, in its broadest sense. Such training or discipline may sometimes involve punishment; but to represent to the ordinary reader God's dealings with His children as all punishment, is a travesty of the truth.

The oft-quoted verse in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, again, loses nearly all its tenderness and strength in the feeble and ambiguous phrase of the old Version, whilst the Revised makes it rather worse than better. There is little sense for the modern English reader in the words 'peaceable fruit,' and certainly there is no attractiveness in the colourless term 'exercised' thereby. Yet no suggestions can be of more solid value and genuine inspiration for this age, than those actually contained in this comprehensive and noble utterance. The real peace possessed by the noble character which results from thorough

moral discipline—what equal to it can the feverish fuss and frivolity of to-day offer? In the concrete, men acknowledge it freely. Thousands of young men gathered a little while ago to gaze in rapt admiration at Sandow, as on a revolving pedestal in brilliant light he exhibited his fine muscular development. Yet this is but the physical analogue of the writer's thought here concerning moral character. Our very word 'gymnasium' comes from the term he employs. Those wise teachers of to-day who are endeavouring by athletic drill to lead young people to walk uprightly, to breathe properly, to learn the use of their limbs, so that they may carry themselves nobly instead of sinking into a narrow-chested stoop, are only exhibiting in body the ideal for which, in soul, this ancient writer pleads. Surely the latter ought to be made as attractive as the former. Athletic training we know involves much trouble. Many physical trials and pains and difficulties have to be patiently endured before the weakling can become anything like a Sandow. But who will deny that such bodily tribulation is well rewarded? Who that has thus entered into the kingdom of God physically—for that is what health really means—will grudge the difficulties he had to encounter, within and without, in order to attain to the perfect physical peace of a well-developed body? Experience is the best answer.

But the experience of the lower may well point us to the benediction of the higher. If all the difficulties involved in bodily discipline are to be accounted joy, in view of the precious result, how much more should we welcome such trials when the character result is held out—‘that ye may be perfect and complete, deficient in nothing.’ The whole value of our life is indeed here in the balances. The clear understanding that our struggles are but pledges of progress, that our difficulties are real opportunities, that even our pains are just blessings in disguise, is worthy of our best efforts of mind and heart to obtain.

The very first suggestion of the words here contemplated is the genuine painfulness of discipline. How vast is the difference between reading, writing, singing about trials, and finding oneself in their actual grip, the experience of daily life brings home to all of us. To say that—

Labour is rest and pain is sweet,
If Thou my God art there—

is ordinarily nothing more than pious rhapsody. And even if moments of exaltation are possible, as sometimes in the martyrs’ flame, when it seems to be literally true, they are but rare occasions, and as such are entirely distinct from the plain, cold, prosaic pains and difficulties which enter into ordinary human life. There is tragic evidence that Jesus Himself found no such relief in His

daily conflicts, or even on the cross. Nor did He anywhere hold out the hope to His disciples that the cross He called on them to bear, would be other than really painful to flesh and blood. Rather it must be owned that the cross that was no burden would be no cross. The discipline which involved neither pain nor difficulty would contradict itself, both as to its nature and its results. The very essence of discipline is painfulness, and its special value lies in the qualities of soul which the patient enduring of such pain calls into exercise. Thus Christian philosophy corresponds with normal experience, and in finding it thus true to nature at the outset, we may well be led on to appreciate its deeper and higher lessons.

The representation of discipline with its accompanying pain and difficulty as inevitable, if human life is to be made worth living, is in perfect accord with all the doctrine of the New Testament, no less than with the latest teachings of science. On the world-scale the accepted theory of evolution means the survival of the fittest as emerging from the struggle for existence. Whilst as to the individual human being, there is no part of our complex nature, from the highest to the lowest, which does not enforce the same principle. Health of body, strength of mind, skill to work, as well as nobility in character, come to men only as the result of the pains and difficulties

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of discipline. The greedy glutton, the reckless drunkard, the sensual libertine, are always, even physically, mere bloated or flabby failures. There is no royal road to health, for prince or pauper, save along the lines of self-control. Without personal grappling with difficulties, no wealth on earth can give a man intellectual capacity or strength of mind. Universities may confer diplomas, but they cannot bestow either knowledge or merit. Nor is there a single position in human society worth holding, or a single good in human life worth having, which does not require that the difficulties of costly effort should be frankly faced and nobly borne. The best in everything is only reached by the pains of upward climbing, never by the ease of sliding downwards.

When, therefore, it is remembered that the Christian ideal of life and character is the highest and noblest of all, comprehending lesser excellences as surely as the light of day includes in itself all the colours of the spectrum, it is seen to be at once natural and necessary that such a character, above all others, should result only from the severest discipline. The plain assurance that 'through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God' is much more than the echo of a word of comfort to the early Christians in their persecutions. It is an abiding principle, rendered inevitable for ever by the very greatness of the ethical

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significance of the kingdom of God. 'Holiness' may be despised in the world and too often ignored by the Church, none the less it stands for 'that higher-toned goodness'—to recall Professor Seeley's words—which leaves behind all other goodness as the gleaming summits of the Alps look down on lesser heights. How much difficulty is involved in attempting the highest, only experienced climbers know.

The same lesson may be learned from our more prosaic civilization. It is with men as with their manufactures, the more worth in the fabric, the more cost in the making. A piece of iron ore picked up in the mine is worth nothing; but purged of dross and forged into a horse-shoe, it becomes valuable. Let it, however, be turned into steel and hammered into knife-blades, and that value is vastly increased. But let the disciplinary process go on still further, until after endless heatings and batterings it is fashioned into watch-springs, and its worth will be enhanced a hundred-fold. It was verily no mere poetic fancy but a true parable of human nature's need, when Tennyson wrote that—

Life is not as idle ore,
But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dip't in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom,
To shape and use.

To think, indeed, of all the fiery trials and shocks of pain that must be endured before the ordinary human animal, with his innate selfishness and pride and passion, can be transformed into a man of God after the image of Jesus Christ, is little less than appalling. Small wonder that the average human being shrinks from it. The aim may be well enough; it is the costly, prolonged, disciplinary process to which he objects. This repulsion by reason of inevitable difficulty, is the real cause and explanation, beyond and above everything else, of what is called religious indifference. In most cases it is not really indifference, but unwillingness to pay the price for the higher as compared with the lower. It is indisposition to face the pains of earnest thinking and holy living. Men do not deny the crown, but they decline to take up the cross. They dare not despise goodness, but they would have it cheap, i.e. without difficulty. So they sigh for faith without problems, success without toil, soul health without exercise, possession of the highest without self-denial, character without effort.

Why should they not have it? Why should there be stumbling-blocks in the sluggard's way? Why should it be impossible to roll lazily down hill into virtue? Why should difficulties strew the path to the highest? Why should every life worth living involve crosses to be bravely borne? Why

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should not all things human be arranged on the plan of the superficial unbelief which is always telling us that if God were good there would be no ill, and that if He were perfect there would be no difficulties or hardships for His creatures under any circumstances? Colonel Ingersoll was fond of saying that if he were God he should have made health catching instead of disease. Apart from the fact that health is so largely under our own control, what really and scientifically are the lessons of infectious disease? Any honest observer knows. Any child can draw a Chinese picture, for the outlines are easy and there are no shadows. When done it will be correspondingly unreal and useless. So is the dream of painlessness. It all seems so sweetly easy. No influenza, no typhoid, no small-pox, no lessons for children, no unanswerable problems for men, everybody getting everything they want for nothing, health without trouble, happiness without effort, truth-finding as easy as smoking, character built up in sleep. It is a dream indeed, as unreal, as vain, as foolish, as the airiest night wanderings of unguided fancy. A moment's careful thought shows that, human nature being what it is—and certainly we must deal with experience and observation—all such notions are as mischievous as they are babyish, as false to fact as foolish in principle. One watchful hour spent in any nursery is enough to silence for

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ever such philosophic prattle. It is really nothing more than the whine of the infant for its latest fancy ; the cry of the spoilt child to be allowed to live on cake. It is the empty-headed protest of the idle boy against his lessons, because he likes play best ; it is at root the shallow-hearted plea of the modern worldling to be let alone with his stimulants and narcotics, his sports and his club companions, without being troubled about anything higher or nobler.

Surely it is sufficient answer to all this common but pitiful imagining, to mark well what would be its issue if adopted. It would, in a word, be the reduction of the world to one huge *crèche*, and the dooming of human nature to everlasting babyhood. Be the pain of trial and difficulty what they may, no greater curse could fall upon humanity—as we know it to be in ourselves and in others—than the removal of all our difficulties, whether of body, mind, or soul, intellectual or moral, personal, social, or national. The only conceivable result of such withdrawal would be human parasitism—as Drummond would say, a vast *Sacculina* out of a corresponding *Pagurus*. A life of universal and uninterrupted lotus-eating for men and women would inevitably mean the spread of a race of mindless, heartless, strengthless imbeciles, a misery to themselves, and a plague to each other ; as far removed from true manhood as a jelly-fish from a

statesman ; as far below the standard of Christian nobility as the selfish lustful roué below the moral level of the Christ of the Gospels.

In order that this estimate of the benediction of difficulty may be no mere suggestion, void of substantial truth, let us in swift summary review the indubitable influences of trials when nobly borne, and of conflicts won through patient endurance of pain.

I. At the outset it is plain that the very occurrence of such seeming ills is the hall-mark of a higher nature. The greater the difficulty the greater the dignity. In every well-conducted school the hardest tasks are necessarily and honourably put upon the most advanced pupils. It were sheer disgrace for a senior scholar to have only elementary work set before him. A mathematical student aiming at the Wranglership and yet asking for easy problems, is inconceivable.

When Jesus asked 'How much then is a man better than a sheep?' part, at least, of the answer is that the man has difficulties, whilst the sheep has none. Does any farmer, worried about his rent or troubled concerning his crops, ever envy the cow that gazes at him with such mild-eyed thoughtlessness over the gate as he goes his round? Was not John Stuart Mill right when he avowed that 'a man dissatisfied is better than a

pig satisfied' ? It was an unbelieving poet who wrote—

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods there be,
For my unconquerable soul,

but such appreciation of a dauntless self is utterly Christian. It is the gospel of Christ which, above all other philosophies, endorses the Psalmist's staggering conception : 'Thou hast made him but little lower than God,'¹ and insists that we are meant to be the 'first-fruits of His creatures.' Difficulties, therefore, are for us but the measure of our supremacy over 'the beasts that perish.' They are truly the steps of the throne on which man should sit as the masterpiece of creation. His very trials are the pledge of his royal sonship.

2. It is only through difficulties that we obtain a true estimate of ourselves. Not amidst sunshine and flowers, but in storm and stress, comes out the strength or weakness, physical and moral alike, of each individual. No man knows what is in him for good or ill, until he has been searched by trial, or put to painful test by some keen conflict. Until a heavy burden has to be borne, there is little or no knowledge of the weaknesses which may lurk in our constitution, no idea of the

¹ Ps. viii. 5, R.V.

strength we are capable of putting forth. The soldier who has never been on campaign does not know whether he is cowardly or brave. He waits for the whistle of the bullets to tell him. What is the worth of a sailor who has never been in a storm? Neither he nor the captain can say. The pitiless hurricane, the frightful rush of the cyclone, the fearful collision, the awful cry of 'Fire,' with all that may follow—these are the tests that reveal him to himself as no calm estimate ashore and no 'manœuvres' can ever do. So is it truly in the storms of life, not on its sunny days, wherein we find ourselves, either with shame or thankfulness.

3. Thus does it also come to pass that our trials save us from ourselves. When weakness is discovered, nothing can cure it save further conflict. The constitution that cannot face a blizzard to-day, never will do so save by meeting it again bravely to-morrow. What may be in Mars we do not know, nor can science tell us. But on this planet, and amongst men and women, it is clear and sure that perpetual 'sweetness and light' would but breed a race of spoiled and sickly bipeds. However natural and enjoyable as well as necessary be the blithe and happy days of childhood, we have become men not through them alone, but through the following years of conflict with difficulties then unknown. We have gained

our adult nobility by the loss of childhood's toys. Who that is human and sane would not rather have the pains that lead to manhood, than retain such sweet simplicities as would doom to everlasting childishness? Truly Esau was not to be envied in his impetuous choice. It was a mean, pitiful, cowardly thing, to fling away a birthright just to escape the pangs of hunger a few moments sooner. Alas! it is as modern as ancient a story. Now as ever 'Wisdom is justified of her children.'

4. In our day the same craving is no less real for being more refined. The man of the twentieth century may have evolved too far to put the mere filling of his stomach before the preservation of his rights, but his intellectual hunger shows signs in plenty of being not less imperious and passionate than the physical. Why should he not know everything he would, easily and at once, without further difficulty? If God were love, says the popular and superficial clamour, why does He not make Himself and His ways perfectly plain to every man? Why should there be any mystery, any room at all for doubt, any need for the slow, laborious, and painful processes of learning through science and history and criticism? Why not feed every man's soul with spiritual milk which should give him no more trouble to masticate than to obtain? It is really the old Esau attitude, with the addition not seldom

of the sneer of later and darker days—‘If He be the king of Israel, let Him come down from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who so said were too hoodwinked by prejudice to perceive that such seeing would involve moral blindness. For to make unbelief impossible would be necessarily also to make belief impossible. The very difficulties of belief are part of the worth of a true gospel. No test of moral character is more sure than the question as to what a man does with his doubts and fears. It is as true as ever that ‘there lives more faith in honest doubt . . . than in half the creeds.’ Difficulties are the price to be paid for reality. The greatest source of weakness in Christendom is the easiness with which numberless professors of Christian faith persuade themselves that they hold what has cost them nothing. They are always mistaken. It is shadow, not substance, with which they beguile themselves. Genuine conviction cannot be bought or borrowed ; it has to be won.

He fought his doubts and gathered strength ;
He would not make his judgement blind ;
He faced the spectres of the mind ;
And laid them. So he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.

Such conviction becomes the ‘pearl of great price,’ well worthy of all it costs.

5. Furthermore, difficulties not only test moral

character but they tend to make it. Talents may grow in unruffled calm, but character needs storm and stress for its development. The only mitigation of the hell of war is that it brings out the best as well as worst of human nature. Fearless bravery, patient endurance of hardship, ungrudging self-sacrifice for others, heroic faithfulness to duty even in face of death—these are the characteristics displayed on many a field of blood. But during years of peace also, there are conflicts enough in any nation's history to prove that it is ever the difficult crises of political or social strife which create the men of mark and find scope for their energies. In every generation, all the world over, they who have 'battled for the true, the just,' who have borne heavy burdens without flinching, who have faced difficulties innumerable and overcome them, are those who become pure enough to be at peace with themselves and strong enough to be a blessing to others.

6. Another gain accruing from difficulties is the revelation of the truth concerning our fellow men. In the paths of perfect peace there is nothing to unmask each other. Behind a fair outer seeming there may lurk a foul or feeble personality. But when the black night-clouds gather and the storm-centre bursts, when the lightnings flash and the ground trembles beneath our feet, then each man learns whether his former smiling comrade was really

friend or foe, hero or coward. All that was latent in the men of the *Birkenhead*, the Methodist preacher on the sinking *London*, the devoted stewardess of the *Stella*, together with the undaunted patience of the starving and disease-smitten heroes of Lady-smith, would never have been revealed to human sight but for the deadly perils which made their very selves outshine as does the glory of the stars when thrown up by the darkness of the night. One might here also quote well-known words :

O woman ! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made ;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou !

But it would have to be with the distinct protest that for man, not one whit less than for woman, sunshine serves often to display the worst in human nature, and it is reserved for the dark and comfortless night to bring out the best.

7. Nor is that by any means all. Life's trials and conflicts not only reveal the best in the individual, but lead to the best mutually. 'A brother is born for adversity,' said the ancient seer. But it is even more true that a brother is born in and through adversity. Difficulties tend to link men hand in hand, and calamities join them heart to heart. It is said that 'fellow-

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feeling makes us wondrous kind'; but it is in the storm, not in the calm, that such fellow-feeling is most developed. On the crowded raft, when the ship has gone down and despair grips every heart, there is no thought of aristocracy. The pinch of suffering, with the vision of death hard by, drowns all distinctions in the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity. In our modern cities, day by day, full well we know that Belgravia means isolation, whilst Whitechapel is saturated with sympathy. Success, prosperity and ease, ever tend to scatter men in independent self-complacency. It is in sorrow, in conflict, in calamity, that they are drawn nearer together. Whatever mystery of pain or anguish may be beyond explaining in the discipline of life, at least there will ever remain as one of the unmistakable benedictions of tribulation, the unquestionable fact that in it are created those tender ties of sympathy and pure strong bonds of fellowship which never would have been formed in hours of peace. Is it not better, after all, to have brotherhood through pain, than selfish isolation in untroubled ease?

8. Certainly from the Christian standpoint there can be no hesitation in the face of such a choice. The old proverb runs that the 'worst is the corruption of the best'; but it is just as true when reversed. The best is often that which emanates from the worst. Careful thought shrinks

from an avowal that evil is necessary to good. But modern science comes very near to such an attitude. 'We are thus brought to a striking conclusion, the essential soundness of which cannot be gainsaid. In a happy world there must be sorrow and pain, and in a moral world the knowledge of evil is indispensable. The stern necessity for this has been proved to inhere in the innermost constitution of the human soul. It is part and parcel of the universe.'¹

So speaks one of the foremost evolutionists. Its Christian application is seen in the fact that life's trials and difficulties, its pains and sorrows, afford the very largest opportunities for the service of Christ. 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.' How limitless such love should be, as well as how practical, He has made plain for ever in the lesson of the Good Samaritan. Upon the second great command He lays as much stress as upon the first. But the very scope of the former is found in life's tribulations. The robbers gave the Good Samaritan his chance. So must it truly be the golden edge of life's darkest clouds, even when, as often, its silver lining is hidden from us, that here is opportunity for greater benediction than ease and comfort, prosperity and luxury, can ever bring. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'

¹ *Through Nature to God*, John Fiske.

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remains, in spite of everything that the lower self can say to the contrary, the divinely intended result of unselfishness which more than compensates all those who prove it, for the pinch of actual pain or the burden of inevitable difficulties.

9. Yet there are two other benedictions of discipline, in truth the greatest of all, and for that very reason least admitting of delineation in thought, let alone expression in words. The ultimate human need of God here, and of heaven hereafter, is brought home to our hearts in the pain of life's discipline as by nothing else whatever. The experience of Tom Thurnall in the Russian prison, portrayed in fiction by Charles Kingsley, has been repeated in fact by myriads. Human nature's marvellous powers of courage and endurance find at last their limits, and not only the heroes and martyrs of the mission field, but an unnumbered host of earth's noblest leaders and workers have found, like the Psalmists, their 'refuge' in God. Such experience is confessedly indescribable; but its reality is unspeakable. The difference between playing with the name of God amidst the easy-going conventions of religion, and finding oneself in a Gethsemane where the darkness is almost solid and no human help is nigh, so that only God is left, is indeed immeasurable. But for all of us the day draws on when society's pomps and vanities, with all the private pleasures

or public triumphs of daily environments, will be as nothing beside a real answer to the prayer—

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me !

The difficulties and conflicts which bring a foretaste of that answer, a sure though untranslatable consciousness that 'God is a very present help in time of trouble,' are amongst the greatest benedictions of our present life.

10. Finally, though it be a religious commonplace, it is a consideration no less worthy and inspiring, that trials, conflicts, difficulties, point us ever onward to the rest and peace of ennobled character when life's discipline shall have done its best, and death its worst. There is to-day truly little danger of 'other-worldliness,' through the influence of religion. Apart from the coarse sensationalism which is content with animal delights year in year out, the very gains of civilization, with all the accumulating riches of science and art and aesthetics, tend to make human nature quite content with the present. In a refined as well as in a brutal atmosphere, in the midst of Christendom quite as truly as beyond it, men and women grow increasingly content to eat the leek and enjoy the fleshpot, as reckless of aught else as Esau of his birthright.

Yet is it all, when taken at its best and

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utmost, but a poor, petty, unworthy estimate of human nature's potentialities. Surely the child at school who never cared for home would be a pitiful anomaly. The growing youth who was content to sit continually in his mother's lap and play with toys, would be rightly deemed an imbecile. If proved to be sane, common sense would suggest the whip ; or some such shaking as should waken him to a sense of life's coming higher duties and nobler responsibilities. A similar purpose is well served by the inevitable difficulties, the sore trials, the bitter disappointments, the inexplicable bereavements, which so often constitute the tragedy of life's discipline. They sting us into thought and action, no less than drive us to a larger hope. They not only bid us look forward for comfort's sake to 'where beyond these voices there is peace,' but remind us that all this discipline, nobly borne, is training for another sphere of life and service as much higher and worthier than this present, as the career and character of a noble man are than his previous existence when an unborn babe. Well may the apostle exclaim in view of such a result, 'Every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure.' It is, in very deed, a 'hope that maketh not ashamed,' and inspires to every noble endeavour.

All these brief hints at the varied phases of

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benediction issuing from life's crosses are not only true, but they combine like the many-hued flashes of a finely-cut diamond, into an unspeakably precious whole of comfort and inspiration. In full view of these we may well endorse Browning :

Then welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness
rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand, but go !
Be our joys three parts pain ! Strive, and hold cheap the
strain ;
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the throe !

There is in the whole philosophy of the gospel no premium upon asceticism, no scorn for the bright and beautiful, no approval of the morbid blindness to earth's innocent joys which has sometimes passed for piety, no forgetting of the painfulness of pain. But for all that, it is scarcely too much to say that without our difficulties human life were not worth living. The most noble of all human lives ever lived, had truly its joy and peace, but was yet fullest of difficulty and trial. Christ's own increasing tribulations culminated, we know, in earth's greatest tragedy. 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

So that James is right, in the end. In spite of the pain, we may account it 'all joy to fall into manifold trials.' From his Master, above all others, the true disciple may learn to say,

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'Blessed be tribulation!' None too strongly has a recent Bampton Lecturer spoken hereupon. It is rather a timely protest which says:

'The belief that pain is the one real evil infects much of our social and philanthropic effort to-day, and is one chief obstacle to the acceptance of real Christianity. But short of Christianity, Reason and Experience teach us better things. Sooner or later we learn that suffering is the inevitable lot, not to be escaped by any of the sons of men. And after a moment of passionate revolt, we begin to understand that the inevitable is not, or not always, unnecessary and degrading, but in many ways beneficent.'¹

Blessed, indeed, are the trials and difficulties that make us men, instead of babes; pure and patient, instead of passionate and selfish; fitted for measureless development in character and service beyond the grave, instead of being content to eat and drink and live and die 'like the beasts that perish.' So far from blighting human life, tribulation is the opportunity to crown it with glory and honour.

¹ *The Reproach of the Gospel*, Bampton Lectures for 1907, by Rev. J. H. F. Peile, p. 65.

III

PERSONALITY IN RELIGION

Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me? . . . Follow thou Me.

JOHN xxi. 16, 22.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I myself no longer live, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

GAL. ii. 20.

THESE brief excerpts from well-known contexts at least constitute an appeal and an answer to it. That they refer to two individuals does not lessen their force. Tradition tells that Peter was faithful unto death, but Paul's words are so vivid and expressive as to cover both the response of his own life and that of his fellow apostle to the Master's call. Here and now we may more especially note that this direct appeal and intensely personal answer, exhibit the very soul and substance of the meaning for humanity of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The whole theme of religion is confessedly as vast as unquenchable. Even those in our own midst who reject Christianity, acknowledge that they must have some other religion as substi-

tute.¹ In which case everything manifestly turns upon the nature of the substitute. Whether religion is to be a human blessing or curse, must depend upon the principles it inculcates and the practice with which it is accompanied. In these respects Christianity claims to stand alone. To-day it has no scorn for other religions as such. Its missionaries have learned to go forth, not with contempt for other faiths, but with earnest desire to show their devotees the 'more excellent way' of Jesus Christ. That His way is in every sense the most excellent, the true disciple cannot but claim with all confidence. We are sometimes told that a conflict is impending between Christianity and Buddhism. If it be so, the true Christian will rejoice, for only by the comparison which that involves can the superiority of Christianity be shown.

To do justice to any religion, however, its main principles must be definitely accepted and sincerely practised. So long as the Gospels merit any regard, Christ's crucial test holds good—'If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know about the teaching whether it is from God.'² So comprehensive an utterance gathers within itself the whole compass of human life. Here we will be

¹ 'Let us learn from Cromwell. If we are to fight the gentlemen of England, we must have not crop-eared 'prentices filled with selfish greed, but men of religion. If Socialism is to live and conquer, it must be a religion.'—R. Blatchford, *Altruism*, p. 10.

² John vii. 17 (Weymouth).

content to think but of one aspect of it, even that which above all else is enshrined in the appeal and the answer above quoted. One might, indeed, get as true an answer from the Psalms as from the whole New Testament. 'Follow thou Me'—'Lo, I come to do Thy will'—the principle is the same, the supreme importance of personality, in essence and in exercise, for genuine Christianity.

1. Mark first the great distinctive principle which must needs be made as clear and vivid as possible. In regard alike to the being of God and of man, Christian faith starts with the assumption of unmistakable, all-important personality. This is no mere technical assertion of metaphysical subtlety. It is rather at once the simplest and most august, the most familiar and yet most important consideration in the whole matter of religion. Here above all stands out large and clear the contrast between Christianity and Buddhism. The latter wholly denies the divine personality, and aims at the destruction of the human.¹ To it conscious

¹ The latest statement of this is perhaps in the words of Bhikshu Ananda Metteya the Scotchman turned Buddhist monk who has come to teach his creed in England: 'Buddhism, with its central text of non-individualization, is capable of offering to the West, to England, an escape from this curse of Individualism, which is the deep-rooted cause of the vast bulk of the suffering of mankind in Western lands to-day.' One might as well say that health is the cause of crime because almost all criminals are healthy. The mission which can only call for the destruction of Individualism is a gospel of despair. Christ bids us prize it, purify it, employ it for holy purpose.

human life is a burden to be got rid of, and the only ultimate hope is its absorption in Nirvana. But Christianity, insisting first upon the divine personality, then emphasizes the human for appreciation now, as well as for measureless development hereafter. Both these main principles are set forth with unmistakable clearness in the two great commands emphasized by Jesus Himself, which give us the very heart of His message to humanity.

The personality of God is asserted by Him with sublime simplicity. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' would be utterly meaningless, unless both the subject and object of such a command were actually a person. No scientific or metaphysical definition of the nature of God is ever attempted in the New Testament, any more than in the Old. But in both alike, though with more tender emphasis in the New, the personality of God is everywhere assumed. Certainly it is never represented as a human personality. All the anthropomorphic figures of speech of the whole Bible give no warrant for any such thought. Rather, when all is read with becoming humility and sincerity, do we find warrant for the deliberate avowal of modern philosophy that 'Perfect personality is in God only; to all finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof.'¹ Instead,

¹ Hermann Lotze, *Microcosmus*, ix, 44.

therefore, of thinking of God as a magnified man—according to the frequent sneer of unbelief—Christianity thinks of man as an infinitesimal copy of God. Concerning God Himself, Christian philosophy is equally firm and humble in its assertion of a divine Fatherhood, as real in relation to men as incomprehensible in ultimate nature.

But the sun's tiny copy in the dewdrop is true to all the properties of the circle, no less than the sun itself. So is the infinitesimal personality in human nature true to the infinite in the divine. Unparalleled stress is therefore laid by Christianity upon the reality and preciousness of human personality. Whether on the lips of illiterate believers we hear of a 'soul to be saved,' or listen to those who more learnedly refer to human self-consciousness as the crowning distinction which is unapproachable by any other creature known to us, the meaning is the same. Here, in the consciousness of personality, which whilst sanity remains cannot be questioned, is the hall-mark of the divine in every human being. This is the link that binds man in direct relation with God, and at the same time reduces all other distinctions between man and man to insignificant trifles. Man, as such, is 'crowned with glory and honour.' No measure can be alleged in answer to Christ's question, 'How much then is a man better than a sheep?' As living personalities we are ordained

to be 'first and noblest of earth-born creatures.' In view of such innate human dignity there is really no more room for 'aristocracy' than there is warrant for speaking of a 'bottom dog.' The former is but an artificial and selfish fiction of society. The latter is unworthy as a figure of speech, and when seriously suggested¹ is utterly degrading. Bad indeed some specimens of modern civilization may be ; but even as to the worst and lowest, 'a man's a man for a' that,' and as such is rightly held responsible for his deeds, as well as actually open to appeal.

2. For the personality he possesses means not only self-consciousness but moral consciousness, such as no other creatures can know. This moral consciousness, embodied in conscience, is the very essence of manhood and womanhood. Without it a man becomes a mere 'creature of heredity and environment,' i.e. an automatic biped. Of all the pitiful sophistries which popular appeals have sought to foist upon the unwary of this day, none has surpassed, if equalled, the assertion² that 'If

¹ Whether Mr. Blatchford's use of the phrase, 'a defence of the bottom dog,' is to be taken as a mere figure of speech, or regarded as the actual and necessary inference from his 'Determinism,' may be best judged from his own words: 'There are some wrong-doers who are base or savage by nature. These should be regarded as we regard base or savage animals: as creatures of a lower order, dangerous, but not deserving blame nor hatred' (*Not Guilty*, p. 19).

² Printed four times over, in italics, in the course of a few pages of Mr. R. Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*, p. 131 et seq.

God is responsible for man's existence, God is responsible for man's acts.' One might as well say that every father is responsible for the acts of every child. Certainly the father is responsible for the child's existence. But no one outside an asylum would say that he is responsible for the acts of his son or daughter. And for the simple reason that that son or daughter is a person, and not a thing. A writer is responsible for every word that flows from his pen, because a pen, being only a thing, never acts at all. So too if God really were responsible for man's acts, then it would simply but inevitably mean that man never acts at all. His manhood would be gone and only thinghood remain. Yet this pitiful stuff is masquerading in cheap print as philosophy, and is exercising influence upon many modern people. It culminates, as already hinted, in Mr. Cotter Morison's assurance that 'the sooner we get rid of the notion of moral responsibility the better it will be for society and for moral education.'¹ Against all such self-contradicting inanity the gospel of Christ speaks with no uncertain sound.

3. It not only assumes that the distinctive human mark is this possession of moral consciousness, but it intensifies to the uttermost the value and dignity thus conferred upon every individual.

¹ *The Service of Man*, cheap ed., p. III.

Christianity has often been taunted with individualism. But it has no occasion to blush for such a reason. Rather is it the glory of the Christian gospel that it always begins—though it never ends—with the individual man. Our fathers indulged, it may be confessed, in some very strong rhetoric concerning the value of the human soul. But their exaggeration in figures of speech was far more true, as well as more creditable, than the modern Haeckelian monism which asserts that man is ‘of no more value to the universe at large than the fly of a summer’s day, or the smallest bacillus.’¹ So precious, in the light of Christ’s revelation, is every human personality, that all the distinctions of civilized society such as rank, position, wealth, influence, intellectual capacity, sink into comparative insignificance. The one simple but crucial question is, man or beast?—man or thing?—which? So that Descartes, for all his desire to be thorough, was both redundant and ambiguous in his famous formula, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ For simple existence is already asserted in assuming, ‘I think.’ What we most want to know, is thus left an utter blank. ‘Therefore I am’—am what? Well, at least, not only a being, but a thinking being; a person, not only self-conscious but morally conscious, and therefore a moral agent, with power to choose ‘twixt

¹ *Riddle of the Universe*, cheap edition, p. 87.

right and wrong, and consequent capacity for love, for hate, for sin, for holiness.

Such personality, the possession of every ordinary individual, is soon affirmed, but its contents are, as a rule, little recognized. Comparatively few human beings rightly appreciate themselves. Personality is one of the elementary familiarities most easily underrated. It is nothing until thought about, and then it becomes a measureless and unfathomable ocean. The following weighty words from one of the first men of science in France, may well serve as a modern comment upon Christ's question above quoted, and at the same time serve to save any man from the self-contempt involved in the current fallacies of popular but falsely-named 'Determinism.'

'All these phenomena show us that what we call human consciousness, human personality, a phenomenon which at first sight seems quite elementary and cannot involve any contradiction, is much more complicated than we think. To know that we are ourselves and no one else, because we have the consciousness of the vibratory phenomena by which we are surrounded, seems to be as simple as anything can be. But in reality this notion is extremely complex, as complex as the intelligence itself; so that when we speak of personality, of higher consciousness, of lower consciousness, we have in reality entered upon the most formidable

problems of psychology. Therefore we must repeat here the Socratic phrase, "Know thyself." By knowing ourselves, in fact, we shall know the greatest mystery of the universe within our reach.'¹

4. Whatever scientific mystery may here refuse to be unravelled, this at least is clear, that personality is the source of all that is best and worst on earth. As a man's body is of far greater value and potency than his coat, so is his personality more precious and more potent than his body. The mystery of the relation between soul and body may be left as insoluble. Science can no more tell us what it actually is than common sense can question personal experience. But the activities of human personality are beyond all question. All the worst things on earth, the only real curses of society, come from the perverse energies of human personalities. From the same source come also all life's most real blessings. Love and hate, cruelty and sympathy, selfishness and unselfishness, the extremes most influential for good or ill in all human life, spring always and only from the working of personality. The best of everything on earth undoubtedly is love. It may take a myriad forms of expression, but in kind, though not in degree, these all are one.

¹ Prof. Chas. Richet, *Annals of Psychical Science*, May 1905, p. 296.

They are the creation of a free personality. For, assuredly, love is far too real, too sweet, too wonderful, too potent, to spring from any psychological mechanism, or be the result of any manner of mental compulsion.

5. Here it is that Christ's message to humanity comes with such overwhelming significance. He asserts what no other religious teacher has ever dared to affirm, viz. that this very noblest effluence from personality is true of the One and only God of all the universe. He bids us believe and know that—'God is love.' If that be so, then it is the best as well as utmost expression of the divine personality, in relation to the world of humanity. The only conceivable objection to such a revelation is that it is too good to be true. It is quite irrational to be content with the hackneyed objection that infinite personality is inconceivable. For if the inconceivable is necessarily the unreal, then we ourselves are unreal; seeing that human personality is in itself quite inconceivable. But any suggestion which involves the non-existence of the suggester, is so manifestly self-contradictory that it may be dismissed without a qualm. We do not know, confessedly, how God can or does love man. Neither do we know how we love each other. Agnosticism, therefore, in this respect answers itself.

What we do know, as a truth clear beyond question and significant above all expression, is that in Jesus Christ we see love incarnate, and it is He Himself who deliberately and unmistakably asserts—‘He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’ So He becomes at once the true representation and the eternal pledge of the love of God towards humanity.

He speaks thus not only as Son of Man but, in unique sense, as Son of God. This unparalleled divine Sonship it is which gives all-sufficient validity to His message. And all attempts to reduce Him to mere though lofty manhood must always fail, because the records which are sufficiently reliable to give us a real manhood, must at the same time show either more or less than manhood. No good mere man could by any possibility utter His words or assume His attitude. Even the new school of theology which professes to identify Him with humanity, attributes to Him divinity in prayer.¹

How then can He be only human, essentially

¹ Thus in his book Mr. Campbell says that ‘It is quite a false idea to think of Jesus and no one else as the Son of God incarnate. We thus effect a drastic distinction in kind between Him and ourselves. It is untrue to say that any such distinction exists. The human and divine were blended in Jesus without making Him essentially different from the rest of the human race.’—*The New Theology*, pp. 108, 96. And yet often in public prayers at the City Temple the same writer speaks thus: ‘Lord Christ, Thou eternal Manhood, the strength and substance of our own, we come to render our humble devotion unto Thee. Help us—take care of all these people, comfort those who are in any trouble—we ask it for Thy name and

indistinguishable from ourselves, if all men everywhere may call on Him for help? No. It is truly because He is human that we can appreciate His testimony to the reality of the love of God. But it is because He is more than human that we can trust that testimony. His teaching gives us, without any possibility of misunderstanding, not only a personal God our Father, but One who in His love for mankind gives us the best He has. Here we both may and must appeal to experience. Amongst ourselves, seeing that we are persons and neither mere animals nor things, love is the utmost expression of our personality, the very best we have to offer to each other. And we know that it is always precious and potent in proportion to the degree of its intensity. So, on the transcendent scale, the Christ of the Gospels, in unapproached sense Son of God as well as Son of Man, is the pledge alike of the reality and the intensity of the love of the infinite God for mortal men and women.

mercy's sake.' Is this, then, the way in which a mere man, i.e. one distinct only in degree, not in kind, from ourselves, is to be addressed? If it be, the Christian religion is a delusion. For if such a prayer may be prayed in London, it may also in Edinburgh, and in New Zealand, and at the same time. Hence ubiquity, at least, is absolutely necessary, in the Christ here addressed, to redeem the prayer from inanity. So then we are to have a ubiquitous Christ—'no abstraction, but a spiritual reality, an ever-present Friend and Guide'—who is yet indistinguishable in His humanity from ourselves! If this is anything more than self-contradiction, it is blasphemy.

6. But we must go farther. From our own experience we know that love, as the best and utmost expression of our own personality, can only find a worthy object in another personality. No person can really love a thing. In easy-going speech a man talks of loving his family or his country. But it is never strictly true. What he really loves is each individual person belonging to his family or nation. There is no more difficulty in loving six than in loving two. But he can by no possibility love even one, unless that one be, like himself, a living person,—or at least potentially such, as is the new-born babe—capable first of appreciating and then of reciprocating the self which, as with outstretched hands, a person offers when he loves. Nothing else, nothing less than this, is meant by Christ's doctrine of the love of God. Its true significance and expression are for ever found in what Paul said concerning Christ Himself—'Who loved ME and gave Himself up for ME.' That divine love should be thus truly focused, without mistake and without difficulty, in each individual human being, is the distinctive, wonderful, awful assertion of the Christian gospel alone, of all the religions upon earth.

7. Yet another truth, last, but surely not least, remains. Love that is centred in a personality, can be satisfied with nothing less and nothing else than the reciprocating love of that person. On

our own little human scale this is at once the glory and the tragedy of life. Its default is even more dreadful than death, as numberless poor pitiful suicides have testified. The old word is as true and tender, as fierce and insatiable as ever, 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned.' If, as we sit in peace and comfort at the sweetest feast, or the liveliest entertainment, or the most solemn service, a voice that we could not doubt whispered in our ear that the one we loved most felt towards us no love in return, would not the poet be bitterly, crushingly true who wrote—

The night has a thousand eyes and the day but one,
Yet the light of a whole world dies
With the setting sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes and the heart but one,
But the light of a whole life dies
If love be done.

Would not our peace be gone, our enjoyment ruined, our very soul racked beyond the relief of any environment? We should helplessly go out to lonely misery. Because love is the best we each have, as a living personality, to offer to another person, therefore love never will, never can, be content with less than love in response. This is assuredly no less true on the transcendent scale. If it be true that God is love towards each human being, the only possible inference is that

expressed with such sublimity and tenderness in Scheffler's hymn¹:

Fountain of good ! all blessing flows
 From Thee ; no want Thy fulness knows,
 What but Thyself canst Thou desire ?
 Yet, self-sufficient as Thou art,
 Thou dost desire my worthless heart ;
 This, only this, dost Thou require.

8. Here then in brief, and yet in fullness, is the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the very heart and soul of what Christianity calls 'salvation.' It is simply but actually the meeting God's best with our best. The comprehension of the infinite is never necessary to the apprehension of the divine. As really as we know that the best any one human soul can offer to another human soul, is the unfathomed mystery but unmistakable reality of love, so may we learn of Christ concerning God and ourselves. If we learn anything at all from Him, we cannot but understand that God, the eternal Father, in Jesus offers to each human soul His best, His love, Himself.

And more. As surely as we know that in our little human world, when we offer to each other love, the best we have, our very self, then in return everything less than the best, the love, the heart, the soul, of the loved one, will be rejected with pain, if not with scorn, so is it, for so it must

¹ Wesley's translation, Methodist Hymn-Book, No. 36.

be, on the greater scale. What are creeds, liturgies, buildings, vestments, ceremonials, donations, organizations, public services, and the like, in comparison with what the God and Father whom Jesus reveals, expects from each of those to whom His love is made known? We have but to ask how the true and tender and passionate lover would receive, in response to his whole heart's appeal, some money, a book, a trinket, fine speech, instead of the love for which he yearns. So may we know something of God's own estimate of the difference between real and seeming Christian faith, between the mere patronage of the 'oncer' and the genuine trust of the penitent. It is not a question of what is called religious emotion. That may well vary according to temperament. It is a question of the presence or absence of heart reality.

9. Here is the starting-point of the true Christian doctrine of sin. No plea need be made for verbal or pietistic extravagances, such as some advocates of the New Theology delight to pillory. The really wild assertions which we are concerned in the name of the gospel, as also of all that is best in humanity, to contradict, are such as these—that sin 'has occupied in Christian thought a place altogether disproportionate to its true worth'—that 'sin has never injured God except through man'—that 'there is no sin against God which is not a sin against man.' Which teaching

virtually rules God out of account, reduces His Fatherhood to a fiction, and treats His love as a verbal trifle. Yet the very writer of these strange words has, we are told, one loved child. According to his doctrine that child can do no wrong. For there are no other children against whom wrong may be committed. Has a father then, in himself, no need of love, no right to reverence? Such suggestion is a pitiful ignoring of the tragic number of broken-hearted fathers and mothers who have lavished love upon an only child, only to be repaid with loveless ingratitude and wilful rebellion. If these also are not possible towards God, the whole Bible is a fraud; and the first great command, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength,' becomes nothing more than a mechanical stringing together of meaningless vocables. It is verily a poor theology, whether new or old, which seeks to put emphasis upon the second great command by trampling under foot the first.

The true gospel, on the contrary, is obliged here to find the sin of sins, whence all other sin and shame and woe follow as the natural and necessary consequence. Concerning these two supreme commands of Jesus, we are for ever compelled to say that he who does not keep them both, keeps neither. But their keeping assuredly begins with the first. And there is no risk at all

in avowing that if that were kept, the second would take care of itself. The plain tendency of to-day to reverse this order, is neither justified by philosophy nor by fact. Theology has never really made too much of sin, when it is viewed in the true light. Theology may have made too little of the reality of the love of God. But when that is apprehended as it should be, then, even as the brightest light must ever cast the deepest shadow, the greater the love the greater the sin of turning from it. There may be truly many degrees of evil, but so far as Christian doctrine is concerned, one definition of sin is applicable to all. Sin is the scorn of the love of God. And persistence in that scorn is the only possible or conceivable 'sin unto death.' Even then it is sin unto death not because of any divine decree or vengeful punishment—for love can never hate—but by reason of inevitable consequence. The punishment of unrepented sin is always and for ever self-inflicted. It is simply to go on increasingly to be sin. To scorn love is, and must be, to be without love. So that when the apostle declares that 'sin is lawlessness,' his word must be interpreted, if we are to be true to Christ and His doctrine of sin, in its highest not lowest terms. Defiance of the Ten Commandments is but a partial and pardonable lawlessness, as the writer of Hebrews insists, compared with the self-will or passion which

knowingly tramples on the highest law—the law of love. The fourfold condemnation of sin is thus as natural as it is woful. It springs necessarily out of the very essence of sin. The attitude towards God which deserves to be called ‘sinful,’ because it offers Him, even though in a myriad differing degrees, less than love, less than our best, shell for kernel, sham for reality, is quadruply shameful. (i) It is utterly unworthy; for every self-respecting man or woman would refuse to accept such treatment from each other. (ii) It is suicidal; for it cuts off from any possibility of knowing what Christianity means by experience. ‘The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts’—means no more to the mere church-going formal Christian than the *Om mani padme um* of the Eastern faith. (iii) It is useless for Christ’s purpose of establishing His kingdom on earth; for it has neither ideal nor dynamic, but is content to go the religious round as aimlessly and as profitlessly as the bands in some great factory when they are off the effective part of the revolving wheel. (iv) Certainly it is hopeless in view of the great hereafter. The true summary of all the eschatology that Christianity needs, is in the solemn yet tender word of Christ Himself—‘If ye believe not that I am He—the true revelation of the real love of God—‘ye will die in your sins.’ There is no threat involved in such

warning. The 'shall' of the English Versions here, as in numberless other cases, is altogether misleading. 'Ye will' is the inevitable and woful future, not less but more terrible because of its gentleness. What hope of blessed eternity can there be for the man who passes hence with the scorn of love persistent in his soul? At least we know of none, nor does Jesus Himself tell us of any. It is always true that we are never in a position to judge any man as to whether he is thus far a sinner or no. That is beyond us. But it is as clear to the mind as fearful to the heart to realize that so long as a human soul scorns love, God Himself can do no more to save it.

10. The conclusion of the whole lesson, then, is that true 'salvation,' according to the Christian faith, consists in making the most and best of our own personality, by whole-hearted response to the divine personality. Such a best and utmost naturally demands two things, of both of which by very virtue of our nature we are capable—if we will. Decision and cultivation, these are the terms upon which alone all that is deepest, tenderest, most blessed in human love comes to pass. It is even so in regard to human communion with the divine. Decision is the solemn test wherein our moral responsibility lies. Here there is neither compulsion from above nor help

from around. 'Lovest thou Me?' 'follow thou Me'—are appeals, not commands. The only possible meaning of the command 'Thou shalt love,' is an appeal to the love-power within us as living persons. Here we have to leave each other alone with God, as helplessly as for our bodily life we have to leave each other alone to breathe the atmosphere.

But well we know that even when between young human hearts the all-deciding 'Yes' has been spoken, it remains for the months before marriage, and the years after, to cultivate love's reality into such inexpressible growth as Charles Kingsley speaks of so truly and tenderly. 'There will come as the years roll by a deeper, sounder faith and love, from experience. An experience of which I shall not talk here, for those who have not felt it would not know what I mean, and those who have felt it need no clumsy words of mine to describe it.' The analogy is as reverent as true, concerning the attitude and experience of heart which grow ever more real and deep through years of constant heart-felt response to the appeal of the first great command.

Thus to make the Christian religion what it should be, both to each human soul and to all human society, to make it in the widest as well as deepest sense, real, tender, blessed, potent, helpful, hopeful, the secret is, in a word,—the consecration

and cultivation of personality. In simplest phrase, it is the definite response to and constant reciprocation of the love of God with our whole heart. In fuller expression, one who exemplified it declared, 'I have learned the secret—I can do all things in HIM that strengtheneth ME.' So does Christianity begin and end with personality. It is the incarnation and incandescence of a double love. And seeing that the former, the love of God for man, is sure and changeless, the reason of Christianity's comparative failure is only too manifest. Salvation—in all that it means, as to soul and body alike, now and hereafter—whether for an individual, or a nation, or a world, depends not upon God but upon man. The reality of love divine cannot, even if it would, incarnate a gospel in human religious unreality.

IV

THE SILENCE OF JESUS

Then saith Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He gave him no answer, not even unto one word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

MATT. xxvii. 13, 14.

MOST of us on superficial reading of these words will be disposed to exclaim—‘and well he might!’ For we cannot but marvel too. Just as on a previous occasion the ‘sons of thunder’ thought that fire falling from heaven to consume opposers, would be at once a splendid announcement of their Master’s Messiahship and a potent contribution towards the coming of His kingdom, so it might well seem that here, in the presence at once of the heathen magnate and the Jewish mob, was a splendid opportunity for holy self-assertion and effectual affirmation of Christ’s claim to dominion. Surely He might now have delivered such a discourse as should have put all His enemies to confusion, and have awed the Roman governor into setting Him at liberty, even if not also converted him into a disciple.

But these gospel records often exhibit the super-humanness of their theme in contradicting our strongest and most natural notions. The prophetic ideal of the divine—‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor My ways your ways, saith the Lord’—finds its emphatic and fuller echo throughout the New Testament. In Himself, no less than in all He said and did and suffered, Christ was not only the greatest contradiction to the expectation of the Jews, but is still an insoluble problem to ordinary humanity. The sometimes questioned ‘originality’ of Jesus may always be answered by asking whether either theology or philosophy, or both combined, could have given us such a biography if they would, or would have done if they could. ‘Who among His contemporaries,’ well wrote Mr. John S. Mill, ‘was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, still less the early Christian writers.’ His character and behaviour may truly be described as, on the whole, just the opposite of the human average. When most men would have fought, He submitted. When they would have yielded, He resisted. When we should have been tolerant, if not approving, He was indignant. When most of us would have been even furious in indignation, He

was calm and patient. When we should probably have been silent, He spoke out vehemently. When the ordinary man would have warmly protested, He said nothing at all.

Yet, in the case before us, one cannot but ask, What could have been the meaning or intention of this persistent silence? Can we deem it accidental or meaningless? Or will a little reverent and careful thought discover in it some instructive significance? We know how often at other times He had spoken as plainly as patiently. It is surely impossible that this scene should merely be an exhibition of heartless stoicism, or callous indifference. With our knowledge of His whole character, there are some things of which we may be fairly certain. Such silence on His part could not indicate foolish pride. It could not spring from mere obstinacy. That He was reckless of consequences, or insensitive to His environment, is not thinkable concerning the Christ who elsewhere sighed so deeply over sin, and wept at the grave of Lazarus, as well as in view of the guilty city. This is the same Jesus who only a few hours before groaned with anguish and perspired in blood. Whatever else, then, His stillness before Pilate meant, it could not be that He did not care. The more, indeed, we think of it, the deeper grows the conviction that there must have been some real and worthy reasons for such demeanour, at

such a time and amidst such surroundings. 'There is a time to be silent and a time to speak,' said the old seer. That undoubtedly is what is impressively exemplified before us here. From such a One, and under such unparalleled circumstances, the lesson for us must be alike precious and important, well deserving our appreciation by means of thoughtful analysis.

Let us then consider, first, who composed the furious howling mob around Him. Perhaps the well-known picture by Munkacsy may help best to give us something like a true conception. That fearful ring of scowling faces, black and bitter with all the hate of bigotry, may well give us pause in our inquiry. What did they mean, and what did they want? Were not all these the very men and women who had already heard Him teaching and preaching again and again in their own synagogues? Nay, were they not part, at least, of the crowd who only a few days before had heralded His entry into the city with shouts of 'Hosanna'? How strangely composite was the environment of the hour, Doré's wonderful representation of His leaving the Praetorium may well be left to portray. But it is a tragic scene which cannot be dissevered from the preceding history. To appreciate it we have to bear in mind all that we can learn concerning the months, if not years, preceding. The astonishment of the common

people as they gladly listened to Him ; the growing jealousy of the Rabbis ; the accumulating bitterness of Scribes and Pharisees ; the reaction of disappointment in the fickle crowds who had thought of Him as another Judas Maccabaeus,—all these items have to be added to the general condition of religious unreality, and moral as well as spiritual corruption, which characterized the nation in its helpless but sullenly resentful submission to the pagan might of Rome. Only from full recognition of all the circumstances can we apprehend how it came to pass that the recognized Prophet and Healer, the wonderful new Teacher who had been hailed as the coming Messiah, was in the end delivered up with execration to be done to death by the very authority that the priests and people alike most of all hated to recognize. When all that is hereby connoted is taken into account, though not before, we may be in a position to draw some such general inferences as may afterwards enter into our own ideals of discipleship. Certainly throughout his Master's behaviour in this gloomy inferno of human passion, the Christian man cannot but hear Him saying, with tragic emphasis, 'Come unto Me, and learn of Me.'

(i) Perhaps the first and simplest lesson is that it is better to be silent when the best speech would be wasted. Had He spoken, we know that His words would have been, as they were at other

trying moments of His passion, calm and gracious. They would not have been in tone and temper such, for instance, as were Paul's under somewhat similar though less tragic circumstances shortly after. Whether we think of Peter in the servants' hall, or of Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin, we are obliged to note that herein the disciple was not as his Master. The words of pity which soon after fell from the Sufferer on the cross, tell us how here also He would have spoken had speech been of any avail. But there are times, alas, when even gentlest words of truth and love are but as 'pearls before swine.' When they are manifestly worse than useless, there is no virtue in such waste. It is better to be silent than to sing the angels' song to mocking fiends. There is room in this present world for economy even in goodness. When it is all too plain that to speak would be merely to increase reciprocating malice, or give occasion for further virulence, it is better to be still. The beauty of holiness needs sometimes to be protected by the severity of silence.

(ii) Christ's silence here seems also to indicate that He recognized the human helplessness of His position, and so turned from men to God. Who does not know how pitifully many such occasions have arisen in human history? It is only too sadly sure that there will be yet many more, in varying degrees and circumstances. One of the

most lurid features of the mystery of evil is that times do come when the fury of evil passions, like the flood from some huge burst dam, carries men beyond all contradiction or appeal. When surrounded by his murderers, mad with the greed of gold, poor Professor Palmer, we are told, plied them in their native tongue equally with expostulations and with threatenings. But it was all in vain. They had suffered their guilty gluttony for loot to bear them beyond the point of appeal, and, like some vast structure blown by a hurricane beyond recall to the perpendicular, there was nothing left possible but crime. Such situations are truly too horrible to bear contemplation. The irresistible tornado of bigotry which swept Pilate as well as Jesus away in its insensate hate, was only what He had foreseen from the beginning. Again and again He had spoken of it as His coming 'hour,' to the perplexed disciples. What He meant they knew not then. But afterwards they understood only too well. Now they could only in bewildered helplessness witness their Master's agony. But to themselves also, in later years, was fulfilled His word, 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.' In company with vast numbers of others they were confronted with a similar ordeal. Thousands more, since then, have bowed under the same conviction of human despair. Reputation, character, and even life itself have been brought

to that last stage when all appeal to the reasonableness or pitifulness of men has been utterly futile. In that dread hour there is nothing left but to concentrate the whole soul on God, and in calm unworded faith gird oneself for the final issue. The human heart can then only find its refuge in voiceless prayer :

O what could hope and confidence afford,
To tread that path, but this—Thou knowest, Lord?

(iii) Yet again. Such silence as this of Jesus certainly also betokens the utter absence of all selfish or craven fear. It is the plea for dear life that fills the last moments of many a poor victim with anguished eloquence. It is the torment of a fear which may well be pardoned, that goads so many in near prospect of cruel death to give way to strong crying and tears of entreaty. But on the calm brow of this patient Sufferer shone the pure light of unflinching heroism. Such fearless indifference provokes our admiration even in the savage, although we know it then to be the hard result of brutal training and callous ignorance. But these were no part of His nature who, as a lamb in the midst of wolves, stood arraigned at Pilate's bar. He whose majestic silence at once infuriated the mob, and awed the otherwise haughty Roman governor, was none other than the gentle Teacher to whose arms the little children

had flocked ; the truthful embodiment of the old prophecy concerning the Servant of God—

The crushed reed will He not utterly break,
The dimly burning wick will He not quench.¹

Here surely, as never before or since, met and mingled in wondrous harmony the tender sensitiveness of womanhood with the unyielding strength of manhood. No more amid the pandemonium of the bloodthirsty rabble, than during the unspeakable physical agony of the cross, had He recourse to artificial calm from the mingled wine and myrrh. Rather with undulled appreciation of the whole seething chaos around Him, and with clear prescience of all that was before Him, He cringed not, nor sought pity of any man. If to Him may be applied the pathetic cry of the prophet—‘ See if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow,’ we may surely add—was there ever manhood like unto His ? We read that when the three Hebrew children faced their fearful ordeal of fire, they uttered but few words, and those of calm confidence, for they were strengthened in heroic companionship. But the ‘ Fourth ’ who was with them, when it came to be His turn as mortal man to confront the fiery furnace in awful loneliness, said nothing at all, but committed His soul ‘ in well doing, unto a faithful creator.’ He

¹ Matt. xii. 20.

had no more to fear from death than to expect from the pity of the mob. His silence was but the crown of His triumphant manhood. The purest souls know best how much room there is for even the bravest hearts to pray :

O may I triumph so
When all my warfare's past,
And, dying, find my latest foe
Beneath my feet at last.

(iv) A little further thought suffices to show how thus Jesus also preserved and crowned the whole peerless dignity of His preceding character. Most Englishmen would consent to the suggestion that the calm fortitude with which Charles I met his end, went far to redeem his earlier follies.

He nothing common did, or mean,
Upon that memorable scene,
But, with his soul's interior eye,
The axe's keener edge did try.

But He whom they derided as 'King of the Jews' had nothing to repent, nothing to amend, nothing to regret. All that was needed in His case was that the pure testimony of the life should be maintained to the uttermost. Here we see how it was more than maintained. His royal majesty was far more manifest in the Judgement Hall than when the fickle crowd surrounded Him with their superficial hosannas. Nor did one harsh word stain His

unmatched dignity. It was evident, indeed, that all speech, however clear and pure, would then have been travestied by bitter prejudice, or twisted into fresh grounds of accusing. Yet there was certainly large opportunity for counter-recrimination. We know how Job long before, and Paul soon after, were, like most of us, not strong enough for silence when stung by false accusation. They sacrificed the dignity of their innocence to the pleasure of a retort. But so did not He. Christ's wonderful patience remained unsullied. 'When He was reviled He reviled not again.' So He gave to all His followers the noblest example no less than the loftiest precept. Most of us fall sadly short of both. The purity of soul that can afford to be a target for evil without retaliating with fiery arrows, is too oft beyond us. It belongs to 'the things that are above.' Yet are the times not few, in almost every noble life, when such patient silence as Jesus here exemplified, is the only way to preserve the character and dignity of a man of God.

(v) We have no right, however, to infer that this silence of Jesus cost Him nothing. Rather, if He were truly human and sharer of our nature, we know that it must have cost Him much. One wonders if there is really anything harder for a sincere and upright man to bear without reply than false accusation. On another and more hopeful

occasion Jesus Himself, we read, faced His foes with the query 'Which of you convicteth Me of sin?' All the more here does His silence give us proof of the perfectness of His soul's self-discipline. Thus His dignified stillness exhibits in fullest and noblest measure that 'fruit of the Spirit' which in our English New Testaments is as unfortunately as wrongfully rendered 'temperance.' Probably not one in a hundred readers or hearers understands that this feeble word represents one of the strongest and noblest terms of the Greek language. But of such *ἐγκράτεια*, such full-orbed 'self-control,' no more impressive exhibition can be found in human history than Jesus gives us here. We are too often so poorly disciplined within that very little suffices to break down our moral defences. A snappish word, an unkind tone, or even a sinister glance, draws forth a retort in which moral weakness blends with resentfulness. But there was unmeasured significance in the Master's word—'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.' For even as a horde of savages breaks harmlessly upon a small troop of disciplined veterans, when raw recruits would be scattered to destruction, so do occasions for despair or opportunities for violent passion throng in vain upon the soul made resolute in God by previous training. The silence of Jesus shows how His holy self-discipline has made Him proof against all

assaults of malice from without, as well as all inducements to wrong within. Our great lesson is to mark that such perfectness of self-control was no sudden miracle, but the spiritually natural result of years of daily complete obedience to the Father's will.

(vi) It is further to be noted that this silence of Jesus meant, and surely was intended to mean, something to those around Him. In their hearing He had often before spoken plainly, graciously, sufficiently. There was, therefore, nothing to add, nothing to retract. In such a case the strongest confirmation of previous testimony is silence. If we were but as good and as wise as He, how often should we say more, if we could but say less! It is often so hard to believe that silence may be more impressive than speech. We are apt to forget, in our eagerness, that added words may sometimes weaken where we most desire to confirm. But the sublime impress of the silence of Jesus must have struck into the very souls of those who howled upon Him in vain. So in our efforts to contend against evil, or to fortify good, are there few lessons we have more need to lay to heart than the confirming and convincing power of discreet and holy silence.

(vii) But in the case before us there is much more than simple confirmation of previous faithful pleading. This solemn silence really constituted

Jesus the Judge of His accusers. For it virtually amounted to the pronouncement of a sentence of condemnation upon the obstinate perversity of His enemies. Who does not know sadly enough what is meant when in regard to some poor patient gripped by deadly disease, the physician in attendance gives permission to feed him with anything he likes? Such removal of prohibition is all too significant. It is but the trained judge's acknowledgement of hopelessness. It is the gentlest pronouncement of the sentence of death.

It was even so, here also. When regarded with reverent scrutiny there is something terrible in this unbroken silence of the victim of Pharisaic malignity. It amounts to nothing less than a tacit pronouncement of doom. It conveys the tragic acknowledgement that their moral and spiritual condition was beyond healing. He whom they reviled had indeed given them previous warning tenderly enough. It was with heart-wrung tears that He had cried, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not.' Truly the occasion for pity is aggravated when it comes to genuine tears. But now they were past even His tears. Nothing was left but the silence of divine despair. 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone'—had once said the solemn voice of the old

covenant. But this silence is yet more solemn, more dreadful; for it meant that now, at last, Jesus left them to themselves. What hope can remain for those whom the Christ of the Gospels gives up? Was not this hopelessness the very meaning and measure of His tender warning a few hours later—‘Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me—weep for yourselves and for your children’? Nothing so direful can possibly happen to human souls, as that God should cease to plead with them. Divine silence becomes in such case the most awful portent of doom. We know full well the dread oppression of sultry stillness which precedes some terrific thunderstorm. So here was the silence of Jesus fraught with premonition of coming woe. How soon, how terribly fulfilled, history only too luridly relates.

(viii) Yet once more. Careful thought cannot fail to note that this same silence bespeaks the entire absence of vindictiveness. The murder of Professor Palmer and his companion, mentioned above, in the desert wilds of Arabia, was tragedy enough, cruel and dastardly indeed—beyond all characterization. When all appeal to the better nature of his murderers was manifestly useless and all further expostulation was seen to be futile, we are told that he tried cursing, as a last resort, in hope of frightening them from their intended crime. But that too failed. So the last words with

which the desert then rang were awful imprecations and never-to-be-forgotten maledictions. Without doubt they were deserved, in such an instance of sheer cold-blooded murder for greed.

But they were yet more justly merited in the case of the innocent One who thus stood before that Jewish mob unmoved, well knowing that He was soon to be done to death much more horribly than were the English travellers. Yet He turned not at last to threatening. No curse escaped His lips. Once only He broke the silence, to shelter even His callous judge from false imputation. But neither for Him, nor towards those who panted for His own blood, had that majestic Sufferer any words of recrimination. 'When He suffered, He threatened not.' His sentence upon His murderers was passed in sorrow's silence, not in words of anger. Hate was as far from Him as fear. His pity only deepened as their depravity intensified itself into exasperation. So came it to pass that out of the very silence of His despairing grief issued, a little later, the plea on their behalf. Almost His last word was, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

To glance thus with reverent scrutiny over the whole of this sublime picture, is to feel with the centurion, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' Such combination of meekness with majesty, such

blending of dignity with pity, such wondrous power of self-control together with utter forgetfulness of self through trust in God and love for men, such patient endurance of vicarious suffering which might have been ended at a word, may well have moved the world's heart as nothing else has ever done—or ever will do. Let the study of comparative religion bring us what lessons it may, there has been and can be but one 'Son of Man' whose mighty silence has spoken and still speaks thus to all the ages.

Now, however, it yet remains to ask whether in all this, as in so much else, He is really our pattern as well as our admiration. His answer appears to be as plain as comprehensive: 'I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done'—But how can it be? There would seem to occur in our lesser lives but small opportunity for the cultivation of all the sublime traits of character which ennobled Him. Yet when we come to examine our lives fairly in all their details, are there not occasions in plenty when in this respect also, as in so many others, we may truly learn of Him? Does a week ever pass with any of us when we may not either by weak and hasty if not vindictive speech deny Him and injure others, or else by something of His patient and potent silence echo His testimony for the holiest, and so help His kingdom of truth and love?

It is often, truly, a hard lesson for human nature. To some dispositions it is doubtless harder than for others. But for all of us the rushing currents of modern life tend to make it ever harder. So much is said to depend, in the fight of daily life, upon our 'standing up for ourselves,' and 'holding our own,' that a lesson in patient silence when strong speech would perhaps be justified, seems to be but a counsel of perfection suited to another state of being. That Christians should be like their Master in matter and manner of speech, would be indeed unmeasured gain for Christendom. But to be silent as He was, when so many things would often goad to hard words or stinging replies, is more difficult still. It is a degree in Christlikeness not easily attained by any of His disciples. Yet, surely, Christian discipleship is only acceptable to Him and helpful to humanity in proportion as we honestly set ourselves to follow His example. We know that it is but mockery, as useless as unworthy, to call Him 'Lord, Lord,' without honest effort to do as He has done. Of such vain repetitions earth, no less than heaven, is tired. But the smallest mirror in the right position may reflect the sunshine, and every Christian deserving the name will rejoice to know that his little life may count for something, if it in any degree repeats that of the Master.

For such reflection and transmission of Christ's

own spirit and character the world, we know, has waited all too long, and is waiting still. Whatever becomes of creeds and rubrics, true Christianity is the practice of the mind of Christ. *Imitatio Christi* is the only everlasting orthodoxy. That alone will avail to fulfil the intention of love divine, and bless mankind by hastening the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth.

Who, then, will guide and help poor ordinary disciples to attain such high self-control and fearless trust as to make this mind of Christ possible also to them in the present generation? There is no new magical answer. There is no royal road for a few; no short cut for the many. To fulfil Christ's ideal the one and only way is as He Himself said—so to come to Him as to learn of Him. To some this seems too simple, to others too sublime, to be daily practicable. Yet, surely, it is just this which every student of science, every devotee of art, every learner of philosophy, has to do if any progress is to be made. To find the true teacher, and faithfully follow him, is the pathway of promise for all ordinary mortals.

It was not in a moment, nor in a day, but only after long years of the patient faith and costly devotion to duty which constitute the chief lessons in Christ's school, that the once passionate and headstrong apostle came to make his great avowal: 'I have learned the secret—I can do all things in Him

that strengtheneth me.' So must we who desire to be Christians indeed, learn of Him, not by admiration, but by daily obedience in little things, not by passing gusts of strong emotion, but by constant watching and praying and communing with Him through His Spirit. Thereby alone can such holy self-control as His be acquired. Then may it truly come to pass that as men said of old concerning the speech of His early followers, so they will say to-day of our silence: 'These men have been with Jesus.' And for this age as for that, no Christian testimony can be either more valid or more valuable.

V

STANDPOINTS

I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ACTS xxvi. 9.

Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. PHIL. iii. 7, 8.

IT is impossible to conceive a more decided or more remarkable change of standpoint than is exhibited in these two avowals of the apostle Paul, taken from different periods of his life. What we call the 'conversion' of Paul has long been a most important and indeed unanswerable argument for the truth of Christianity. And yet in the deepest sense it was really no conversion at all. For conversion, as Jesus referred to it,¹ implies reversion, i.e. a genuine moral change. The perception of this has caused our latest revisers to employ another term. Conversion really signifies the turning from bad to good, from pride to humility, from self-seeking to unselfishness,

¹ 'Except ye be converted and become as little children,' Matt. xviii. 3, in the old version, rightly becomes 'Except ye turn,' &c., in the R.V.

and the like. But in Paul's case it was none of these. It was merely a change of standpoint. Saul of Tarsus had been just as honest and as disinterested as Paul the apostle. The young Rabbi who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel and thence went forth with fiery zeal to persecute Christians, was as pure in motive and sincere in purpose as the 'slave of the Lord Jesus,' who dictated his letters to Rome, and Ephesus, and Colossae. The true inwardness of the great change which transformed his life, was not a divine decree from without, nor a conscious giving up of evil within. It was a heavenly vision which revealed to him that his whole inner standpoint in regard to Christ and His doctrine was wrong, and because it was wrong bade him exchange it for the right. Such is the unmistakable meaning of his own avowal—'Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' Before that vision, he had deemed it quite right and sufficient to view the whole Christian affair which had made such a stir, from the standpoint of the zealous Jew and the learned Rabbi. Thus it was that the life and works and character of Jesus, about which doubtless he knew a great deal more than we shall ever know, seemed to him only remarkable as a pestilent heresy and dangerous form of fanaticism, contrary alike to the faith

of his fathers and the well-being of his nation. In that case, as a Jew well instructed in the Old Covenant, he was not only warranted but definitely commanded to do his utmost to destroy it.

So the paradox emerges that he was certainly right in doing wrong. How vivid was his remembrance of this former phase of his life, often appears in his subsequent letters. 'I am thankful to Him who strengthened me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that He counted me faithful, appointing me to His service. Though I was before, a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; howbeit I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' The simple and sufficient explanation of the paradox is in an added word. He was right in himself; he was wrong in his standpoint. In this respect he is the representative of a vast number of men, probably the majority, in every age. Here, in his plea before Agrippa, the apostle tacitly assumes that it was so with his judge. The personal pronoun in Greek is far more emphatic than our English rendering conveys. It is as if he had said, 'No doubt you are like me, for I too was looking at all this from the wrong position; but now from the true standpoint I see all things differently.' How differently he viewed all things about him and above him, how thenceforth he threw all his

energies into the Christian cause, so that our Christianity owes more to him than to any other, save only the Master Himself, is matter of history. He may well, therefore, be taken as a vivid object-lesson concerning the importance of standpoints to the men of every generation. All the more so because this great foundation truth, like the law of gravitation, seems to be the less remembered the more it is in force. That which we are always exemplifying is generally most ignored, equally as to its theoretical and practical significance.

The first fact, therefore, which looms out large from the living picture before us, is the unmeasured potency of standpoints in our whole moral and spiritual life. All things around us, least as well as greatest, serve for illustrations of this. For as surely as every day we look with our own eyes upon all that we pass in the street, so do we view all men and all objects of thought from the varying standpoints of our own minds, each being quite distinct from any other. Of this the familiar saying 'many men many minds,' is but a convenient formula. In yet homelier speech we say that we have 'our own notions of things,' which is a truism beyond any need of confirmation. Our whole environment becomes thus as some wide landscape, which may be viewed

from the north, or south, or east, or west, but will, in each case, present a different picture to the observing eye. So when two tourists possessed of normal powers of vision, look upon the same scene from the same mountain top, they will see apparently the same natural panorama. But even then, there is an inner standpoint which may make all the difference between the raptures of a Ruskin and the soul-blindness of the average tripper.

Now what the ordinary healthy eye is to the perceiving mind, that moral insight or spiritual sincerity is to the human soul. When the vision is normal, and the mind's attention is sincere, the vision as seen within corresponds with that which actually is without, whether it be a landscape or a character. But a diseased eye corresponds with a dishonest mind, in that it distorts the vision and makes things seem to be other than they are. As the supreme faculty of the body in regard to perception of the outer world is clearness of sight, so the supreme virtue in the human world of moral perception is honesty, i.e. the recognition of things that are, as they are, and because they are. That is the spiritual sincerity which can never call good evil or evil good, but induces a man to love the highest when he sees it, because he sees that it is the highest.

Assuming then such moral honesty, such clear vision of the inner eye—for it certainly obtained in the biography here contemplated, and is true in innumerable other cases—it is manifest that everything else in the soul's estimate turns upon the standpoint adopted. It is then with the soul as with the body, that which we see is determined by the position from which we view it. He who looks into a cheerful fire from an arm-chair in front of it, sees and feels a source of warmth and brightness and comfort. But any one who should view the very same fire from the outer chimney-top will only find uncomfortable blackness and smarting eyes. The visitor to the metropolis who views London on a clear day from the dome of St. Paul's, beholds a vast expanse of buildings which suggest a world of comfortable and happy civilization. But he will get a very different impression if he should take a detailed tour through some of the innumerable narrow streets and congested slums which are close at hand.

No less difference is found in regard to other matters, when the point of view is changed. Modern Christianity, for instance, is in general good or bad, growing or declining, a hopeless failure or a power increasingly making for righteousness, according to the mental standpoint of belief or unbelief. Even as to Christ Himself, He becomes a very different object of contemplation

from the point of view of ancient Judaism, or that of modern rationalism, or of Romish devotion, or of Evangelical belief. Think of the varying estimates of His character and work given by such men as Strauss, Mill, Lecky, Liddon, Bradlaugh, Martineau, Channing, Spurgeon, Gladstone. Not one of these can be accused either of insincerity or of mental feebleness. The irreconcilable differences, therefore, which are so manifest in their opinions, can only be ascribed to no less varying feelings and convictions constituting the individual point of view from which they regarded Him.

Or think again of the opportunities for public worship in the ordinary Christian church. What are they? Seasons of moral inspiration and spiritual delight, or irksome hours of profitless custom to be got through as speedily as possible? All depends upon the worshipper's mental attitude. Even the much-controverted sermon depends far more upon the standpoint of the hearer than upon the ability of the preacher, as to whether it shall be accounted short or long, helpful or irritating, depressing or inspiring. In most cases a purified and sympathetic standpoint on the part of the listener, would reveal truth and beauty and power in discourses which otherwise are dismissed with scornful complaining.

The same obtains in regard to personal

character. Viewed from the standpoint of jealousy or malignity, all a man's real excellences appear but as ugly defects. Whilst from a sympathetic and kindly point of view, even faults and weaknesses become more than tolerable, and redeeming traits abound. Is it not true, moreover, in regard to our whole daily duty or the routine of each ordinary week, that it is one thing from the standpoint of genuine Christian character, and altogether another thing from that of mere religious conventionalism? In the one case, difficulty and disappointment, monotony and drudgery, constitute a weary tangle that makes life scarcely worth living. In the other, work is lit up with the joy of service, troublesome tasks are but happy opportunities, and even commonplace repetition is just the frictionless revolution of the wheels of holy duty. Such we learn was the Master's own experience : ' My meat and drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.' There was much conflict but no drudgery in His life, because He viewed it steadily and viewed it whole from the standpoint of His divine Sonship.

So too, in regard to the whole struggle of our modern life. What does it all amount to? A mere Armageddon of selfish mortals tending to universal chaos and ending in extinction? Or an opportunity for such holy discipline as may lead on to heavenly hope? All turns upon the

standpoint from which it is viewed. Let us put the two views side by side.

'A shadow that passes
Along thirsty grasses,
A brief fungus, fretting
The face of the earth.
A pitiful blunder,
A jest and a wonder,
A laugh from the dark-
ness,
A groan from the dearth.

A cradle to cry in,
A coffin to lie in ;
Betwixt them I steal
Through the fun of the
fair
Chance calling, fate guiding,
Life's roundabout gliding,
Until the grey Dustman
Surprises me there.'¹

A babe that emerges
From darkness to light ;
Heaven's love-pledge that
urges
To everything bright.
Sweet childhood's inspiring
To noble endeavour ;
Youth's joys all untiring,
With hopes failing never.
Manhood developed through
fighting for right ;
Womanhood crowned in
love's gentle might ;
Heart strength and purity,
blended with peace ;
Homes filled with tenderness,
Friendship's increase ;
Christ's own assuring that
Life is God's plan ;
Death but the passing to
measureless gain.

The one exhibits an honest outlook upon human existence from the standpoint of Agnostic pessimism, the other the same from that of Christian trust and hope. The difference is manifestly immeasurable. Whether we should think of Christ as a deceiver, or deceived, may be left to another occasion. This, at least, is abundantly clear, that life viewed from His standpoint

¹ *Agnostic Annual* for 1907.

is as day instead of night compared with the Christless estimate. When, indeed, one of the latest pleaders for modern Agnosticism states the case, we find it put thus: 'Is there no consolation in religion or philosophy to support us in the day of trial, and in the hour of death? Alas! if we take away the promises of Christianity *there is none at all.*¹ But from the standpoint of Christian faith and love and patience, there is no more room for despair than when the sun goes down. Be the mingled mystery of pain and evil what it may, there is no more necessity for hysterical pessimism when it is viewed from Christ's standpoint, than for shrieks of terror when the train in which we travel enters into a tunnel. It is dark; but it will be light. So great in all these cases, as indeed throughout our whole life, is the potency of standpoint.

It becomes, then, correspondingly necessary to ask how any standpoint comes to be adopted. Standpoints no more emerge from chaos by chance than worlds do. Nor are they, any more than a planet, created out of nothing by a word. Sometimes, indeed, they may be formed suddenly, as when a volcanic peak is thrown up by subterranean forces in a few days or hours. But, as

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, April 1908, article by Mrs. H. F. Petersen: *An Agnostic's Consolation*. The italics are hers.

a rule, they grow gradually, like coral islands, from little accretions extending over many years. Confessedly it is often the unexpected that happens, and its happening may greatly affect if not wholly alter any man's point of view. When, for instance, he comes into a fortune which he had not anticipated ; or when some commercial crisis brings the catastrophe that makes a rich man poor. So too in the realm of morals and religion. We learn from history, as from observation, how a sudden upheaval in the human soul may change the whole point of view from that day forward. Not only in the case of Paul, but in regard to Loyola, Luther, Tolstoi, Wesley, and a host of others, we see how the revolution wrought by change of standpoint was as complete as sudden. It is only too well known to many amongst us, that a distressing illness, or the shock of a tragic bereavement, may make all life look different from that day forward.

Yet generally, and as a process ceaselessly going on, it must be acknowledged that the gentle influences of heredity and environment, with accompanying daily acts and habits, are the forces which slowly but surely develop the standpoints of youth into those of maturity and old age.

It is here that the truth turns upon us with the grave reminder of our own real responsibility as moral beings, and the corresponding possibilities

of self-control. Most of all are avowed Christians called upon to make their 'calling and election sure,' by ceaseless watchfulness and holy endeavour. If the standpoint from which we view all things, and more particularly the greatest things, be that which decides our estimates and hopes and fears and conceptions of duty, how serious is the further consideration that we ourselves have in hand the making of our standpoints! True, there is no little talk to-day, both in academic circles and in popular writings, about 'Determinism.' Its detailed metaphysical discussion may be left to another occasion. But when it is openly printed in weekly journals that 'No man is responsible for what he is, any more than is any other animal or plant,'¹ we see at once that the name is as false as the principle is degrading. If we are not responsible, it can only be because we determine nothing; and with that there is an end of 'Determinism.' If, however, we are wholly and helplessly determined by heredity and environment, the only name for that fateful theory is 'Determinedism,' and in its hands we are but as the marionettes which are pulled by wires upon the stage. Against such degradation every moment's consciousness protests, quite as really as the whole doctrine of the gospel of Christ. So long as man knows himself to be man, and neither brute nor machine, so long will

¹ *The Clarion*, March 20, 1908.

his conscience confirm his consciousness, in putting upon himself the responsibility not only of deciding moment by moment betwixt good and ill, but of making his own standpoint out of the materials supplied in heredity and environment, as surely as of making or marring his own health by his daily actions.

This brings us, however, to appreciate the fact that our standpoints admit both of testing and changing. Whether our views and feelings, our opinions and attitudes, have come slowly or suddenly, the total inner standpoint which they involve is neither infallible nor unchangeable. Nothing, indeed, is more required of us as moral beings, than that it should be as thoroughly and as often tested as the compass of a ship, or the condition of its engines. Amidst the ceaseless ebb and flow of life's daily or yearly currents, the standpoints of our lives need to be as carefully watched as the sandbanks of a river; for they are quite as open to dangerous shiftings which, if unknown or unheeded, may work dire disaster.

If, then, we may assume moral capacity and soul sincerity, any standpoint which gives a false result to clear vision, must itself be wrong. Thus from the standpoint of the back offices, any noble building, such as a palace or a Town Hall, must appear ugly and dark and misshapen. Yet any

fair observer of the whole will soon find that really it is not so. It is the point of view, not the building, that needs altering. We can well understand how Christ Himself, from the standpoint of the Scribes and Pharisees, could not but seem to be a fanatic or an impostor. Yet had they been open-minded, they could have proved that these conclusions were contrary to the truth, and that therefore the standpoint from which they regarded Him must be wrong. The same principle applies to our whole modern environment. If from a certain attitude of mind and heart we are driven by honest perception to conclusions which are demonstrably contrary to fact, or unworthy in spirit, then it is certainly the standpoint which requires alteration. Our whole conception of our surroundings—whether good or bad, helpful or hindering, physically or spiritually—is never to be trusted unless it will bear this double test. Does our standpoint, when we know ourselves to be sincere, lead us to conclusions that are true to fact, and worthy in spirit? If it does not; if it leads us to think of any man as being all bad when there is plenty of evidence that he is not so; if it drives us to adopt theoretical conclusions which we dare not correlate with manifest fact; if it begets within us moods and manners and behaviour which are beyond question unworthy of the spirit of Christ; then, so surely as our

sincerity is right, our standpoint is wrong, and the sooner it is changed the better for us and for all who know us.

But the question will then immediately confront us, How can an honest man's standpoint be changed? How can that outlook which has accumulated through many years and has thus become part of himself, be exchanged for some other? Is it not like asking a man to come out of his skin and inhabit another body? Undoubtedly it is a serious question. All the more serious in the degree in which we do it justice. It is on a par with the perplexed inquiry of Nicodemus, 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Yet the first reply may well be found in plain reference to fact. That which has been, can be. And that such a change of standpoint as was witnessed in Paul has also come to pass in myriads of other cases, every one acquainted with the inner life of the churches knows, even without the vivid specifications of Professor James in his famous Gifford Lectures. The plain word of the apostle, 'If any man be in Christ there is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new,' is doubly descriptive. It shows vividly how the standpoint has been changed, and it summarizes what has actually happened times without number in Christian history. Paul's own case might well suffice, for

even if it be more prominent than most others, it is truly typical of the rest. Saul and Paul were one and the same moral character. There was no change of principle. Saul was as true as Paul to what he saw. But when, in obedience 'to the heavenly vision,' Saul forsook the view-point of the Rabbis and stood in soul-perception by the side of Him whom he had persecuted, the change of scene was such that it could only be called a new world, and the reality of the 'new creation' was worthily signified by the adoption of a new name. In after years he summed it all up in the significant avowal that he had 'learned the secret.'¹ But it was an open secret; open enough for every honest mind in following ages to understand and act upon. In a word, plain evidence came to him that his standpoint was wrong, and he responded to the moral appeal by forsaking it for what he saw to be the true and worthy point of view. It had been—'I verily thought in my own soul, with all sincerity, that I ought to do many things opposed to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.' But he opened his mind to the proof that Jesus was far more and other than the Nazarene; and with the ensuing change of mental outlook, the vision of Jesus as 'the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me,' became the never-failing ideal and inspiration of his whole after life.

¹ Phil. iv. 12 : μεμύημαι.

Behind such facts as his case typifies, and at the heart of the innumerable instances of changed lives under Christian influences, lie the principles which answer the question how such transformation can be wrought. When fair and thorough testing shows an honest man that his standpoint has been wrong, because it has led him to conclusions which he sees to be untrue or unworthy, his further course of duty is clear. Whether suddenly or gradually, it is by means of adherence to the true and the worthy, from the very moment of perception and then on with unceasing determination and reiteration, that the right change of standpoint will both come and abide.

Over all else must ever rule the acknowledgment of that which is true. Thus, at the beginning of the fourth Gospel, we meet with the case of Nathanael, who said, when invited to come and see Jesus, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Here was the indication of a definite standpoint concerning both Nazareth and Jesus. How was it altered? By his acknowledging the reality of the goodness then manifested to him in the character of Jesus. So it may be, and ought to be, in regard to all men and all things around us day by day. The actual truth concerning some characters, or some doctrines, is not seldom quite contrary to our estimate of them. Then it cannot but follow that our estimate is false. So the

whole solemn weight of our moral responsibility falls upon us in the question of questions, whether we will still adhere to the false because it seems to be true from our standpoint, or whether, seeing that the truth is beyond challenge, we will forsake our former standpoint for its sake. When a man awaking in the morning sees all things to be yellow, and yet knows that they are really not so, if he be wise he will consult his physician, and seek to be cured of his jaundiced standpoint. But the soul, too, may suffer from jaundice ; and the only possible cure for it is to seek the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and when such is found, to accept it and act upon it. The willingness or unwillingness to do that, is the infallible indication of moral condition, the unmistakable way to spiritual life or death.

Yet is there something more in Paul's avowal, 'Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' The appreciation of the worthy comes in to confirm the acknowledgement of the true. 'The heavenly vision !' Verily there is always a heavenly vision before us all. For the mind of Christ is assuredly the purest, the highest, the noblest ideal of human life and character conceivable. There is no need to argue it, for the admiration of Christ is the commonplace of all noble unbelief, as well as of

all sincere belief. It was the greatest English unbeliever of the nineteenth century who openly declared that 'not even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.'¹ And it was the great French critic, far removed from orthodoxy, who declared that 'Jesus is in every respect unique, and nothing can be compared with him. This Christ of the Gospels is the most beautiful incarnation of God in the fairest of forms, viz. moral man—God in man. For long ages he is king, his beauty is eternal, his reign shall have no end.'² But admiration is not imitation. It is the 'Christ of the Gospels' Himself who tells us, with all possible emphasis, that for the purposes of His kingdom on earth admiration without obedience is useless. The heavenly vision, therefore, which is ever before the eyes of the Christian disciple, affords him a never-failing test as to the worthiness of his own perceptions. If from our standpoint, that character, those opinions, those ideals, which have seemed to be sufficient, in comparison with His standard are seen at once to be unworthy, then, granted our honesty, our point of view is the cause of the contradiction. It

¹ John S. Mill, *Essays on Nature and Theism*.

² Renan, *Études d'Hist. Rel.*

follows that we must either forsake it or forsake Him.

Here, once more, our moral responsibility weighs heavily upon us. For it is not merely a matter of will-power in decision, but of ceaseless repetitions of such decision, and that often at great cost. Nothing, indeed, is more difficult to average human nature, than any real change in the point of view from which the inner man regards the outer world, most of all as to moral and spiritual estimates. Custom, never so strong as in religion, old association, easy-going conventions, pleasant companionships, dread of new experiences, personal pride, fear of consequences—all these enter into the question of any serious change of standpoint, and make it so difficult that in numberless cases the old, though proved false, prevails against the new though acknowledged true. Even in that gradual change from the lower to the higher which ought to be the result of our Christian hours of worship and church fellowship, it is to be feared that the passage from the unworthy to the worthy soul-position is generally zigzag. All too often, hymns and homilies, readings and prayers, intellectual sermons and emotional appeals, are alike in vain to effect any upward progress. The standpoint of the inner man as the pew-holder goes home after such opportunities, remains the same as it was

before. The study of some thoughtful and high-toned book which points us to the noblest ideal, may only too easily be dismissed by prejudice or indolence from further consideration. So sometimes the passing of the years brings only the fortification of that position or outlook of the soul which ought, on grounds of truth and goodness, long ago to have been abandoned as surely and as utterly as Saul changed his inner standpoint when he became Paul.

But such moral lethargy, or spiritual callousness, is certainly no resistless necessity. There is no decree that theology can assert, no helplessness that deterministic philosophy can demonstrate, to prevent each of us from being as obedient to our heavenly vision as was the Apostle of the Gentiles. It is true that there may be required of us some sudden revulsion of thought and feeling such as will call for our utmost power of will in holy decision. Or more often the need may be that day by day, in ceaseless acts of smaller though yet real decisions, we should accept the vision of the true and 'follow the gleam' which leads us to the worthy. But who is to say that these are beyond our power? Where is our manhood if we are to sink down into the ignoble persuasion that fate or heredity have fettered us to the unworthy or untrue? At least the gospel of Christ utters here no uncertain sound. It calls upon men

with unmistakable appeal to justify their manhood by responding to the upward beckoning : ' Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee.' It is not as if we were left alone to struggle unhelped from the lower standpoint to the higher. Help may come in many ways, and none the less divine help because it comes through human channels. The inspiring influences of genuine worship, the companionship of noble souls, the spiritual stimulus obtained from the study of some pure and heroic life—these may all be utilized with unmeasured helpfulness. But, above all else, as we may learn from the instance before us, there is the assurance of the actual sympathy and direct help of Christ Himself. Here we pass confessedly beyond the realm of words into that of experience which cannot be told. Yet it may be sought ; even as Paul sought it. There is deepest significance in his statement afterwards, in his letter to the Galatians, that ' When it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me . . . immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood : neither went I up to Jerusalem . . . but I went away into Arabia.' Here is the succinct philosophy of his great change. Christ was revealed to him, not forced upon him. But he was ' not disobedient ' to the heavenly vision. He sought to adjust himself to an immeasurably altered standpoint. The convulsion was inevitably

great. So great that guidance and inspiration beyond the power of man to supply, were sorely needed. He sought and found it in communion with God alone. Like his Master he was 'driven by the Spirit into the wilderness,' and it does not involve any strained imagination to think of him as passing through an ordeal of temptation very similar to that of Jesus Himself, when His standpoint too was being decided. The cost of the change from Saul, the honoured and rising Rabbi, to Paul, the despised and hunted outcast, was truly appalling. But he 'learned the secret' which made obedience to his heavenly vision easy. Out of the crucial struggle he came forth with the triumph-song, 'I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me,' in his heart, on his lips, and sounding forth from all his life.

Why should it not be so with us in our lesser struggles, as with him in this greater crisis? It must be left with each of us to say for himself. This remains true, alike to Christian doctrine and experience, that our Arabia need never be far away. Real prayer is open to us whenever and wherever we will. But when it is real, prayer is to the soul as breathing to the body. Each act of breathing cannot but mean equally separation from our fellows and communion with the atmosphere. Not less really does all true prayer involve separation from men, in order to actual communion

with God in Christ. Even then, communion is impossible where there are different standpoints. Whether, therefore, in the smaller concerns which fill an ordinary day, or in some great crisis upon which a whole life may turn, real heart-communion with Christ means, and must ever mean, that we exchange our standpoint for His.

VI

THE GOSPEL OF THOROUGHNESS

Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. ACTS iii. 19, Old Version.

Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. ACTS iii. 19, Revised Version.

IT will not be questioned by any who take Christianity seriously, that the gravest problem for the churches of to-day is the ever-growing number of those who, even in this country, are content to remain outside all their efforts and influences. Christianity may indeed be in the air, but the people are not in the churches. It has been suggested that the operative reasons for this indifference, which is ever tending towards positive alienation, have been firstly moral, then intellectual. Now they are said to be mainly social. But the social discontent of the many finds considerable stimulus and embodies an increasing influence from the few who, on both moral and intellectual grounds, loudly denounce Christianity as being untrue,

inadequate, and pernicious. We will not here inquire how much or little these assaults are warranted. It is enough to point out that the changing relations between the Christian Church and its environment demand that there should be a growing recognition of the specially important features of the modern case, and a correspondingly wise and earnest dealing with them. The law of adaptation to environment on pain of extinction, is as applicable here as elsewhere. A belief in the supernatural foundations of Christianity does not carry with it the right to set natural law at defiance.

To some extent this has been recognized during the last half century, and is now being acted upon by churches that are alive. Many developments have come to pass in Christian aggressive efforts since the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. Now and then religious antiquarians are to be found who lament these signs of change as 'down-grade,' and cry aloud for contented walking 'in the old paths'; but the respect with which they are generally treated does not mean that they are seriously heeded. This generation knows well that it is no more advisable or possible to repeat the past in the realm of religion, than it is in science or in commerce. A fair judgement according to facts shows that the changes in method, in spirit, in the statement of doctrine, and in the

manner of efforts to bring it home to the men of the age, are on the whole decidedly for the best. They are not less earnest because more wise, nor by any means necessarily farther from the mind of Christ because nearer to the thoughts and lives of our contemporaries. It is with thankfulness and hope, therefore, rather than suspicion, that thoughtful Christians note the changes which are manifest, even in evangelical churches, both as regards teaching and working. The emphasis of Christian zeal is well and wisely shifting from the pietistic to the practical, from the transcendental to the real, from creed to character, from the merely dogmatic to the rational, from the future to the present, from the individual to the social, from ecclesiastical authority to democratic persuasion. Whilst, however, this is all as it should be, and undoubtedly means that the Kingdom of Heaven is nearer than of yore, there would seem to be no small need to lay stress upon another correction of religious thought, in some respects the most important of all, which did indeed largely develop during the nineteenth century, but needs in the light of the twentieth a clearer and firmer enunciation than ever. This relates to the human share in that co-operation between God and man, which is, according to Christian philosophy, the very essence and method of salvation, both individual and social.

Time was when all that this great word signifies, whether here or hereafter, was left to God to bring about. It was enough to divide men into the 'elect' and the 'reprobate.' Divine sovereignty sufficed to settle the bliss of the one class, and the woe of the other, and there was no appeal from the clay to the Potter. This ghastly misrepresentation was fast driving all ordinary folk outside the churches to Atheism, when Wesley and his early preachers convulsed this country by openly contradicting it, and by proclaiming the gospel truth that 'God is no respecter of persons,' that the offer of His love in the message of Jesus Christ was absolutely free for all men, and that therefore upon each man for himself, and not upon God, rested the responsibility for his own soul. That mighty protest, happily, will never be gainsaid. We now know that as long as Christianity remains in the thought of humanity, it will signify the free grace of God for every human being, whether in so-called Christian countries or on foreign fields. Not only is the old nightmare of 'an irreversible decree' for ever gone, but divine 'sweetness and light' are revealed in the face of Jesus Christ towards all the children of men.

The vast difference herein between the older attitude and the newer, could scarcely find clearer or more significant expression than in the words of Peter quoted above, from the versions of 1611 and

1881 respectively. We may both marvel at and pardon the grammatical blunder of the revisers under King James, but no thoughtful Christian can help lamenting the unmeasured mischief wrought by such a mistranslation as here occurs, and the still worse one of Acts ii. 47. It was quite natural that for more than two centuries unlearned believers should trust their clerical guides, and believe equally that only 'such as should be saved' could be saved, and that only 'when the times of refreshing shall come' could sins be blotted out and the regeneration of a soul or of a world ensue. The astonishing fact is that the words which give rise to such an utter travesty of the truth, are still read in perhaps the majority of pulpits in this land, under the plea that 'the people like them'; and that the difference between old and new Versions is quite trifling! Happily there is a growing number of teachers and hearers who not only value truth for truth's sake, but recognize how vast are the issues which turn in such a case as this upon the difference between the true and the false. It is surely impossible to imagine a greater contrast in the whole realm of religion, than inheres in the question whether the spiritually unsatisfactory state of humanity, after nineteen centuries of Christianity, depends upon and is due to God or to man. In face of all the moral and social problems which meet us on the threshold of

the twentieth century, dragging with them their horrid train of sin and shame and want and misery for tens of thousands of our fellow creatures, are we to understand that all this welter of wrong and suffering means that men are waiting for God to do something? Or is He waiting for men, and especially for His Church, to do something? That is beyond compare the religious question of questions for to-day.

It is all too plain that as regards the Christian Church, with its work and influence upon society, there still lurks about and sometimes stalks abroad the deadly error, expressed in the above mistranslation, of unwarranted dependence upon God, when truly, by the very nature of the case, God is dependent upon us. The attitude of the old Jacobean version is fairly illustrated in the number of well-meaning believers who share the lamentations of Jeremiah over the spiritual inertia of their day, but wait in effortless passivity for the hour 'when the times of refreshing shall come,' in the shape of a Welsh Revival or some second Pentecost, and put all things straight. So have we in all the churches hosts of cheerfully sincere members who view with a resignation that almost amounts to complacency, the difference between the ideal of the Lord's Prayer and the condition of modern Europe, as if it were all inevitable part of the divinely appointed programme for humanity. What is

strangely hidden from them, apparently either underrated or ignored, is their true share in working together with God, alike for their own and for social salvation.

It is agreed that as men we have a share in all that 'salvation' stands for. If salvation does not mean human co-operation with God, the New Testament is a delusion and its moral philosophy a snare. Speaking generally, it may be affirmed with truth that modern Christianity knows nothing of the philosophic fatalism which now attires itself as 'Determinism,' any more than it does of the 'divine decrees' of bygone Calvinistic theology. Let old Omar Khayyám's poetic genius be what it may, the Christian gospel disdains his estimate of humanity.

With earth's first clay they did the last man's knead,
And then of the last harvest sow'd the seed.

Yea, the first morning of creation wrote
What the last dawn of reckoning shall read.

For this is but a summary of the non-moral mechanism endorsed by the modern journalist who avows that 'the actions of a man's will are as mathematically fixed at his birth as are the motions of a planet in its orbit.'¹ Such an estimate assumes the reduction of manhood to thinghood. For, as one of our greatest mathematicians now living has truly said, 'No Laplacian

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, by R. Blatchford, p. 136.

calculator could be supplied with all the data.'¹ A creature with its will mathematically fixed might be a non-moral biped, but it could not be a man. Contingency and manhood are inseparable. Such freedom as in its acknowledged limits is absolutely necessary to manhood, Christianity assumes, and never more really than in co-operation with God. As to what share, however, is really ours, we hear but little. The truth seems, indeed, to be seriously beclouded, sometimes perhaps, from real reverence, sometimes from superstition, sometimes from selfish indolence, sometimes from unworthy fear. Too much, it must at least be said, is left to God. Far too little is acknowledged to devolve upon the human self. Even in the sincere contemplation of such deep words as those addressed to the Philippians, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you,' nearly all the stress of ordinary exposition comes to be laid upon the divine working, although the human share is represented as emphatically as possible both by the compound verb employed and the descriptive adjunct. 'With fear and trembling' is, of course, only a figurative putting of some such plainer phrase as 'to the very utmost of your power.' But if we may judge from hymns and sermons, and especially from average public prayers, the weight of responsibility

¹ Sir Oliver Lodge, *Life and Matter*, p. 160.

which such an exhortation throws upon Christian discipleship, appears even yet to be greatly underestimated. The only possible inference from conventional religious assertions and supplications, is that, alike as to personal character and the Christianizing of the world, we are waiting for God.

Whereas the unequivocal truth is that God is ever waiting for us. Common as is the petition, and doubtless sincere, for a divine 'outpouring' of the Spirit, it must be deliberately pronounced always out of place ; seeing that what is really wanted is the human inbreathing of the Spirit who has already and irrevocably been outpoured.

So serious in its significance and far-reaching in its issues is this needed reversal of much religious thought and speech, that its threefold confirmation, in the whole New Testament, in nature, and in human life, is well worthy of our best attention.

The thoroughness of the apostolic expression in the passage just quoted, is entirely on a par with its usage elsewhere, twenty times over, in his letters. It is also completely in accord with the general representation of the Christian Scriptures everywhere. Nothing is made more plain than the doctrine that God can no more save man without himself, than man can save himself without God. Whether it be an antinomy or not, the necessity for human effort no less than for divine grace, is put beyond all possibility of mistake. Modern

Theosophists, following in the wake of ancient Buddhism, glory in insisting that man is dependent upon himself for any real salvation. But they cannot possibly make greater demands upon human nature than does the gospel of Christ. Quotation is unnecessary, because Gospels and Epistles alike are unmistakable in this regard. With all our modern knowledge of other sacred writings, we must boldly affirm that the Bible exceeds them all in its demands upon the manhood of humanity.

The latest confirmation of the Scriptural attitude herein is from the world of science. Its witness to the call for human thoroughness in all co-operation with nature, is unequivocal and invariable. From the Christian standpoint, it must never be forgotten, the laws of nature are but the expression of the will of God. Viewed as such, their most impressive lesson is that all depends upon ourselves whether they shall bring us good or ill. Much suffering, doubtless, may sometimes be due to our ignorance; but even when knowledge is bought by experience, it is the actual employment of the knowledge which alone rolls back disaster or gives us enjoyment. What is required is patient thoroughness, both in investigation and in action. Without recondite mathematics, accurate to the very uttermost, neither could our liners steam across the seas nor would electricity

illumine our homes and supply the means of conversing at a distance or travelling with ease. Lord Kelvin's compasses and Marconi's wireless messages are priceless and typical exhibitions of God's response in science to human thoroughness in effort.

But all human life truly testifies to the same effect. Whether we think of art or of literature, of medicine or of commerce, the rule which is only made more vivid by few exceptions is that 'unto him that hath shall be given.' That is to say, negatively, superficiality and carelessness mean failure and confusion; whilst positively, success in its most real form ever waits upon thoroughness. Michelangelo, we are told, finished off his marvels of sculpture with his finger-nail. The literary style of a Macaulay, or a Ruskin, or a Stevenson, comes not by magic but by ceaseless study of words and sentences. The unspeakable boons of chloroform and of antiseptic surgery are directly due to the tireless researches of a Simpson and a Lister. Whatever be our estimate of millionaires from a social standpoint, they mean in every case that a man has put his whole nature's energies into his fortune-making, and has succeeded not by accident but by a thoroughness which has sometimes been only too thorough.

Such testimony to the need for the best and utmost that human nature can do for itself being

unimpeachable, it now remains to ask what is its bearing upon those higher problems and graver responsibilities which are inseparably connected with the mission of Christianity in a world like this. What, especially, does such thoroughness demand of Christian discipleship, when we think not so much of personal relationship to God as of potent regenerating influence upon the world of men outside the Church?

It seems really necessary in the first place to insist upon a negative. The thorough faithfulness which is required as really in the realm of religion as in that of science or art, does not, in the Christian case, involve the setting up of mechanical, or pietistic, or fanatical ideals. These have been only too often exemplified in the weird history of asceticism, in the multiplication of monasteries and nunneries, and in the 'retreats' and houses of religion which remain as mild relics of a repulsive past. We are told that former generations estimated the saintly thoroughness of Thomas à Becket by the quantity of vermin that swarmed in the hair shirt with which he tortured his unclean skin. We know not to-day whether most to shudder, or to marvel, at the anti-Christian folly displayed. Yet in Paternoster Row to this very hour may be found the same principle exhibited in the shirts of coarse hair, and wire with fine internal points—sold under the guise of helps to sanctity—whose

purpose is to mutilate the body which Paul declared to be 'the temple of the Holy Spirit.' Only the vermin are lacking to perpetuate the delusions of ancient fanaticism. It is, after all, even more pitiful than repulsive. For here, as ever, the worst is but the corruption of the best. The ideal is right; it is the interpretation which is so woefully wrong. Thoroughness in personal devotion is, and for ever must be, the only logical response on the human part to what Christianity so unequivocally assumes on the divine part. But that such thoroughness necessitates contemptuous trampling upon human nature's noblest and tenderest potentialities, because they are open to abuse, is as false to Christ and His gospel as it is degrading to humanity.

The positive correction of this lamentable negative is best put by the Apostle Paul, in his wise and earnest remonstrance with the Corinthians,¹ concerning the 'diversities of gifts' which may all be utterly consecrated to the same holy service. The appeal 'work out your own salvation,' is at the outset necessarily and intensely individual. But thoroughness in response to it never did or could mean straining at fearful cost after uniformity of type. There was no approach to uniformity in the thorough consecration of the apostles themselves. Nor did the Master Himself ever evince

¹ 1 Cor. xii.

the slightest desire for it. He recognized to the uttermost the idiosyncrasies of His disciples, and only sought to attach each to Himself in order to develop in him all that was worthiest. So, as long as Christianity merits the name, will it recognize fully the indescribable differences which naturally exist between us all, in temperament, in capacity, in ability, in taste. We know that it is the sun's co-operation with the differing physiological constitutions of all the varieties of plants, that paints our gardens with the colours of the rainbow, and makes the whole landscape a vision of delight. If Christendom were as it should be, 'the garden of the Lord,' similar human differences of constitution would bloom out in nobler beauties of character. Meanwhile, the question of questions for each genuine disciple is as simple as severe, viz. 'Is my response to grace divine so thorough that out of me is issuing day by day the best and utmost that can be evoked from my capacity?' It is for the fair full answer to that inquiry, on the part of all who profess and call themselves Christians, that the maximum influence of the Church upon the world is waiting.

For we are here brought face to face with the very essence of the Christian gospel, the assumption which lies at its very heart, and gives it its indefeasible right to be proclaimed as 'good tidings' to humanity. The preaching of 'Jesus

Christ and Him crucified,' with all that follows as represented in the New Testament records, stands for ever as the representation of God's best towards mankind. It connotes, indeed, a double divine best, relating equally to the past and the present. For us the past is represented in the familiar words which convey most transcendent truth—'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.' Of this we ought really to speak with hushed voice and bated breath, knowing that we are but as little ones on the sea-shore prattling about the ocean beyond. But as long as such an affirmation means anything at all, it means that Jesus is the expression of the very best that God Himself could give, at unthinkable cost, to redeem humanity.

Then, further, we are brought right up to the present moment by Christ's own assurance, 'It is expedient for you that I go away, for—if I depart I will send unto you the Spirit of truth, that He may abide with you for ever.' Until Pentecost is proved to have been sheer delusion, it can mean nothing less than this, that He of whom Jesus spoke with such deep and tender emphasis, not merely came to dwell with human kind as never before, but came also never to depart. His coming, His undiminished abiding, together signify that God is now always doing the best and utmost that God Himself can do, to woo and win men

from ill to good, from the lower to the higher,
from themselves to Himself.

O strangely art Thou with us, Lord,
Neither in height nor depth to seek:
In nearness shall Thy voice be heard,
Spirit to spirit Thou dost speak.

To such a conception of the ceaseless pressure of the doubly best divine upon human nature, Christianity is for ever pledged. The main principle emerging is as inevitable as it is awe-inspiring. In all that belongs to the meaning and mission of Christianity on earth, God's best is always waiting for man's best. And the measure of the failure of Christianity is always neither more nor less than the measure in which, whether within the Church or without, men fail from their best to co-operate with His best. Even under the Old Covenant the prophet's word really conveyed this lesson: 'Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' But under the New Covenant it is still more emphatic. 'Repent therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, *that so there may come* seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.' The sin that most of all needs blotting out is not the commission of some wrong, whether less or

greater, but the omission of the right, even the response of the human best to the divine best. Until this sin of sins is blotted out, the 'seasons of refreshing' which stand for the whole Kingdom of Heaven on earth, can no more come by the will of God, than the exhaustless stores of electricity in the world around us can set a single motor going without the apparatus which represents the best effort of science to meet it.

How this principle of thoroughness in all Christian consecration and effort would operate, needs no detailed defining. What each man's best involves, may be left to his own perception and conscience. But to speak generally, the briefest glance in many directions is sufficient to show what would be the immediate effect if only Christendom were thus thorough. We have certainly no right to prophesy that even then all Europe would become Christian indeed. Whether the world of men will ever become truly Christian, is as far beyond our ken as unnecessary for us to consider. The soldier who demanded to know whether the battle would be won before doing his utmost duty, would be shot as a traitor. Nelson gave no guarantee of victory when he ran up his famous signal; nor did any brave man in the whole fleet bargain that England should conquer if he did his duty. Duty in itself is stimulus enough for any honest soul. This at least in the

Christian case we know, that if only modern Christianity were as thorough as response to grace divine demands, the Christian Church would be a very different institution, and the effect upon modern civilization would be immeasurably enhanced.

But little imagination is required to draw the picture of what might be, if only this were so. To begin with externals, there would be no empty churches; there would be very few, if any, 'oncercs'—easy-going patronizers of the gospel for custom's sake, on condition that everything shall be nice and comfortable. There would scarcely ever be a late worshipper; never an irreverent or careless hearer; never a cold, formal, heartless service; never a thoughtless, superficial sermon; never a touchy, merely professional choir; never a Sunday school ruined for want of competent teachers; never a senior class scattered for want of sensible and sympathetic modern teaching; never a week-night service reduced to a dull, dumb show for want of a congregation; never an opportunity for wise aggression lost for want of workers; never an open door to larger growth shut for lack of funds; never a poor sufferer left to lonely pain for want of tender sympathizers; never a wanderer let go into hopeless shame because no one sought for him, or her, with sufficiently persistent love. How easily, in very

deed, might such a list of hindrances, thus ended, and impulses set going for the highest, be extended!

And who will dare to say where the influence of the divine love and power then co-working with the human, would end? Men of science tell us that there is enough energy locked up in a halfpenny to run a luggage train round the world, if only we could tap it. Moral powers certainly differ from physical energies, but at least the suggestion of unmeasured influence is true here also. And here our Christian responsibility for the non-Christian world ends.

Alas, the most cheerful optimist must own that we Christians are a long way at present from discharging that responsibility. But why so? It is scarcely a Pagan, let alone a Christian, reply to suggest that all this is a counsel of perfection, unattainable by ordinary human nature. What is to prevent it except ourselves? The modern fatalist who under the mask of 'Determinism,' declares that 'whatever a man does, it is the only thing he can do,'¹ may attribute everything helplessly to heredity and environment, but Christian philosophy will have nothing to do with such a subterfuge. Shakespeare may suffice to warn us off from that animal delusion :—

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

¹ *Not Guilty*, by R. Blatchford, p. 202.

The recent Bampton Lecturer's assurance that 'it cannot be questioned that the striking contrast between the lives of Christians and the rules which they profess to accept, is the great religious difficulty of the present day,'¹ is a serious indictment which calls for reiteration until we can decide whether it be true or false. If it prove to be all too true, then here is the remedy. Granted the Christian thoroughness just outlined, and such hindrance would be ended at a stroke. Think of a character, a home, a church, wherein there was never a neglected duty, never a lost opportunity, never an unkind word, never an angry look, never even a thought of pride or selfishness, never a harsh judgement, never a taking of offence at a trifle, but ever and always the embodiment of such principles as 'in honour preferring one another,'—'it is more blessed to give than to receive'! Such a church, such a home, such a character, would indeed be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world.' Why not? again we have to ask our own hearts, and then to ask each other. Is there anything lacking on the part of God to prevent all this? Assuredly not, if the gospel of Christ be true. Let us, then, finally summarize the whole case in four plain words.

(i) The failures of average Christendom from

¹ *The Reproach of the Gospel*, by J. H. F. Peile, p. 6.

this Christian thoroughness, constitute the most potent hindrances to the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. To quote once more from the lecturer just mentioned: 'It is a hard saying, but a wholesome one, that the great majority of (Christian) mankind have for centuries done everything with the moral rule of the gospel, except obey it. They have read it aloud in their churches and their homes; they have enshrined it in a magnificent system of worship; they have glossed and commented it till it bears a suspicious resemblance to the code which they find most profitable and convenient; they have shaped and trimmed it into a corner of an otherwise pagan existence.' Verily, if this be so, no other cause is needed for the comparative failure of Christianity. Nor will sermons, hymns, prayers, conventions, all together be much better than mockery, until the actual doing of the very best and utmost possible to each individual, becomes the invariable accompaniment of Christian profession, and the real condition of membership in every Christian church.

(ii) All that is here included depends, not upon God, but upon ourselves. The very fact that for the possession of all our powers we are indebted to and dependent upon Him, instead of setting us free from responsibility, is the very reason why we, being men and not tools, are held responsible

for their use to the uttermost. When we think what some Christian services are on Sunday, and what they might be; when we note the noisy confusion that obtains in many Sunday schools, and acknowledge, as we are sometimes compelled to do, the poor pretences at teaching greatest truths to the rising generation; when we reflect upon what is called Temperance work, and note how thousands of avowedly Christian people who know full well the reality of the modern curse and know that all plea for the necessity of alcohol in health is at an end, yet keep it on their tables for the sake of appearance or mere luxurious sensation,—it becomes little short of blasphemy to gather in huge crowds and sing—

When wilt *Thou* save the people,
O God of mercy, when?

As if God would not 'save the people' at any moment, now as in all the past, if only He could! One would have thought that Ezekiel had spoken plainly enough hereupon, apart from the solemn avowals of the New Testament. Never, we must deliberately affirm, were the words of Jesus so forceful, so applicable, as now: 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation'—i.e. through the expectation of some divine kataclysm—'the Kingdom of God is in your very midst,'¹ i.e. is ready to reveal itself if only men will help, not hinder.

¹ Luke xvii. 21, ἐν τῷς ὑμῶν.

(iii) The essence and value of Christianity for mankind lie just in those influences which depend upon human thoroughness. Not because men can do without God, but because God's part is always done—is always waiting for our part. As surely as the air, with all its oxidizing properties, is ever waiting for our inspiration, so is the love of God waiting for our translation of it into human affairs. How easy it would be to quote from the Gospels and Epistles to this effect! If some specific *chapter* be desired, what could be plainer than such familiar words as Matt. v., or Rom. xii., or 1 Cor. xiii.? If we wish for a summarizing *paragraph*, what better statement can language afford than the opening paragraph of the second letter of Peter—not in the least affected by the modern critic's query as to authorship? If a single *verse* be preferred, who will measure the potency of Gal. v. 22, when incarnate in character? Nay, weigh but the single *phrase* of 2 Cor. x. 5, 'Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' These give us the Christianity for which the world is waiting. Even the bitterest opponent knows well that a church composed of such miniature Christs as these ideals could not but create, would be the greatest benediction amidst all the perplexities and problems of high civilization.

(iv) Such thoroughness of character consequent

upon belief needs no thoughtless fanaticism, no hysterical excitement, no dreamy pietism, for its expression. It involves no impossibility. For it simply means the actual doing of that which is within the reach of a child, or a kitchen-maid, as truly as of an Archbishop or Prime Minister. The child can do his best. The apostle can do no more. But it must be *the best*, no less. The best from each according to his power, in the tender yet piercing light of God's best—as once made vivid in the Incarnation, and thenceforth evermore in the ceaseless influences of the Blessed Spirit—that, and that above all else, is at once the duty and hope of the Christian Church, as humanity enters upon the twentieth century.

VII

HOLY SELF-ESTEEM: A REAL GOSPEL
FOR TO-DAY

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour.

Ps. viii. 5, R.V.

How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!

MATT. xii. 12.

The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; ye are of more value than many sparrows.

LUKE xii. 7.

By the grace of God I am what I am.

I COR. xv. 10.

NO alteration can possibly be more significant than that occurring in the Revised Version of the psalm above quoted. Seeing that its accuracy is indisputable,¹ one may truthfully assert that this single correction is sufficient in itself to justify the replacement of the older version by the newer, wherever the Bible is read in public. Old association is nothing in comparison with truth.

¹ 'There can be no doubt that the only admissible rendering of the Hebrew is, "Thou hast made him little less than divine," or, literally, "Thou hast made him to fall short but little of God." The real significance of the passage is even more suitable to the apostle's argument in Heb. ii. 7 than the LXX rendering.'—*Psalms with Critical Notes*, Jennings and Lowe, i., p. 33.

Nor can any truth be of greater importance than the difference between angels and God, as related to humanity. If it be asked why the writer of Hebrews in the second chapter refers to man as being 'a little lower than the angels,' the answer is very simple. He was evidently quoting from memory, and his remembrance was not of the Hebrew Scriptures, but of their translation into Greek in the Septuagint. This, as most readers will know, was a version made some two centuries before Christ by a number of Jewish scholars, for the benefit of their fellow countrymen in North Africa who had lost the use of their mother tongue. They were probably deterred by reasons of reverence from adopting what they knew to be the exact translation, and so fell back upon a secondary meaning of the word 'Elohim.' But timidity has no more right than rashness to rob us of that which is true. In matters of such vast import we need not only the truth, but the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There is little significance or inspiration for us in the suggestion of our kinship to angels; but the whole meaning of our life, as well as all our hope beyond death, turns upon the question whether or not we are related to God. As the worth of every coin in this realm depends upon the impress of the royal image, not that of any statesman, so does the intrinsic value

of human nature, together with its present duty and eternal hope, depend, not upon kinship with angels, but upon the reality of that relationship to the divine which is so graphically set forth in the first chapter of Genesis. It is the divine not the angelic brand which is set upon humanity. To lose that, would be to lose all that makes life most worth living and heaven worth hoping for. Far too often, indeed, has this psalm been read in public, and probably no less than in private, as if its aim were to belittle human nature. Whereas its purport is exactly the opposite. Even the English of the old version should have sufficed to show that the Psalmist was impressed not by the smallness but by the greatness of man. 'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast put all things under his feet.' But this has been surprisingly and sadly often overlooked.

Certainly there has never been a time in the history of our race when this truth, and all the considerations flowing from it, have been so unspeakably precious or so greatly needed as they are now. For in spite of all our social improvements and philanthropic efforts, the ultimate tendency of modern life is far more to cast down than to exalt the intrinsic value of human nature. Apart altogether from the ubiquitous blight of unbelief, the rush and crush of a civilization which is essentially selfish tends

to dishearten myriads, if not drive them to despair. The ever-increasing pressure of modern life tends to divide mankind more and more sharply into two classes, those who think too much of themselves and those who think too little. It were hard to say which of these classes is the more numerous, but it is not difficult to discern which is the more to be pitied. We hear often and rightly about the curse of pride. Yet there is a kind of pride which is not only holy but the very starting-point of nobility. We quote Scripture freely as to the beauty of humility, and it were doubtless unmeasured gain if all who bear the Christian name herein displayed the Christian spirit. Still there is a false as well as true humility. There is an estimate of oneself so poor and small as to become a dangerous slope ushering down to a bottomless gulf of despair. Self-conceit is no doubt ugly enough to merit the protests it calls forth. But the opposite extreme is far worse. Self-conceit may be objectionable, but self-contempt is ruinous. The former is quite compatible with a lofty hope and a vivid sense of duty. The latter leads straight away to depression, despair, and suicide.

It is all too manifest to every honest observer, —whether he be dubbed a pessimist, according to the shallow custom of the thoughtless, or not—that there is growing room to-day for something that

shall keep men from losing heart, by saving them from self-contempt and developing instead within them holy self-esteem. Those who think too much of themselves, in varied ways, are many and need no describing. But those who think too little of themselves are more, and merit far greater consideration. The bastard humility which breeds despair is a terrible disease, a veritable cancer of the soul, when once it grips a man. And the physical malady is not more frequent in occurrence or difficult to cure than the mental. It is easy enough to write fine articles and deliver fluent speeches upon the elevating tendencies of high civilization, but there is assuredly a method in the madness of such pessimists as Schopenhauer, and Nordau, and Karl Pearson, and Edward Carpenter, with many others, when they point out the present sombre grounds for serious concern about the future of humanity. Let us, however, for a moment ourselves mark fairly how many are the influences which are actually tending, before our eyes, to belittle human nature, and so depress the average man into wondering whether life is worth living, if not into wishing he had never been born. It is a pitiful, nay even a tragic fact, that more men and women are found to-day than ever heretofore, echoing, whether with coarse speech or in highly intellectual reviews, the old wail of Omar Khayyám :

Ah Love ! could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire !

It is verily a real gospel for to-day that can answer such doleful quatrains with an emphatic No !

In order to be true to fact, before considering how the Christian faith would save us from this Slough of Despond, let us carefully note the present-day down-grade influences which are more and more calculated to drive men to it.

We cannot but start with the axiom that there is neither value in life nor hope in death for the man who accounts himself worthless. So long as a human being feels that he counts for something, even if it be only on the small scale, he finds life worth having ; but if somehow he comes to believe that he counts for nothing, that he is worth nothing, and has nothing to hope for, then his manhood is gone ; he becomes merely a soulless animal waiting wearily for the stroke of doom. What then are the modern forces which, if they be not checked, would thus spiritually eviscerate a man, and leave him a hopeless biped wailing and whining—

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the dust descend ;
Dust into dust, and under dust to lie,
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and—sans End !

(i) The first influence to be reckoned with is the enormous increase in modern population, which, under present conditions of land tenure, drives ever-growing numbers into our congested cities. In a little village the humblest labourer is a man, for he is known and counts as such. If unable to work, he is missed ; should he be ill, somebody cares. But in your metropolis—or any of your great similar centres—who heeds what any one of its six millions does or leaves undone ? If he is ill or hurt, who cares ? If he dies, what matter ? In the welter of humanity around him, what chance has the average inhabitant of any of our vast cities to think himself a human unit rather than an animal cipher ? Do not all criminals who can, flee to London in order to get lost in the crowd ? And almost all of them succeed. It stands to reason, as well as to arithmetic, that unless there be some counterbalancing influence, as the mass of the aggregate increases the value of each of the units composing it decreases. It is something to be one of ten, or even of a hundred, but to be merely one vertebrate out of the 1,500,000,000 on earth is altogether too petty a value to be even conceivable.

(ii) Possibly of yore it might mean something to be one human being, even out of so many. For then it was definitely understood that this world of ours was the centre of the universe, waited on by sun and moon and deferentially

watched by lesser stars. But now! even our children would smile at such a suggestion. Rather when learned men like Professor Huxley and Dr. A. R. Wallace each write a book upon man's place in nature, the attempt of the latter to maintain an astronomically central position for our sun, and biological uniqueness for our world as the only celestial sphere inhabited, is brushed aside with general contempt, despite the scientific eminence of its author. The general conclusion of modern astronomy is that this whole earth of ours is but an inferior planet, circling round a second-rate sun which is itself but infinitesimal in a boundless universe. So does the latest knowledge reduce each of us to a speck, crawling on a speck which goes round a speck, and leave us helplessly appalled at our own insignificance.

(iii) But this is far from all the contempt which science seems to pour upon humanity. When men took the opening chapters of Genesis as literal fact, and then deduced a theory of special creation whereby man and woman were unapproachably distinguished from all other creatures, it was comparatively easy to maintain the supreme dignity of the human species. But now it is openly avowed, in the words of Mr. Grant Allen, that—

‘Darwinism rudely upset at one sweeping blow that complacent philosophy of a petty

insignificant terrestrial species. It showed us man as merely one among the numerous mammalian kinds begotten by solar energy in long ages on the surface of a third-rate satellite to a second-rate sun. Instead of being the noblest product of creative effort, a little lower than the angels, our race was recognized as a group of mammals among others its kinsmen, a little higher than the chimpanzee and the gorilla.'

And the latest contribution to this cheerful estimate is from the volume by Prof. Haeckel, which has been so eagerly disseminated by the 'Rationalist' press. Here, again, the reader is assured that—

'In the light of modern knowledge our whole earth shrinks into the slender proportions of a mote in a sunbeam, of which unnumbered millions chase each other through the vast depths of space. Our own human nature, which exalted itself into an image of God in its anthropistic illusion, sinks to the level of a placental mammal which has no more value for the universe at large than a gnat, the fly of a summer's day, the microscopic infusorium or the smallest bacillus. Humanity itself is but the transitory evolution of an eternal substance, a particular phenomenal form of matter and energy, the true proportion of which we soon perceive when we set it on the background of infinite space and eternal time.'

(iv) As if the preceding estimates were not low enough, another suggestion has during recent years been resuscitated from ancient burial, and by means of enterprising journalism together with the ever-cheapening press, has been thrust into the lap of the people under the misleading name of 'Determinism.' This serves to complete the modern anti-Christian belittlement of humanity. So long as a man feels himself to be a moral being, free, that is, to choose between right and wrong, and therefore responsible for his choice, he can afford to laugh at any comparison with a gnat or a bacillus, and can appreciate Christ's reference to a sheep. Now, however, it appears that all such feelings are but pietistic delusions. 'Man can no more sin against God than a steam-engine can sin against the engineer who built it.' 'No man is answerable for his own acts.' 'No man can, under any circumstances, be praised or blamed for any thing he may say or do.'¹ Such philosophical puerilities are not only printed, but actually accepted as true by an increasing number of ordinary folk. Thus we have no longer any manhood left, but simply a bipedal shell to which, equally with a tiger or a rock, says one Professor,² responsibility, character, morality are impossible.

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, pp. 19, 137; *Not Guilty*, p. 10, by R. Blatchford.

² *The Illusion of Free-will*, by A. Hamon, p. 134

Small wonder indeed is it that the modern atmosphere should be depressing, when it is charged with such mental carbon dioxide as is here made manifest !

(v) But even if this poison be avoided, there are other considerations to be faced. It is true that man is 'crowned with glory and honour' by the actuality of his capacity to sin. For that necessarily means moral potentiality. But the keenness of the struggle hereby involved is vividly typified in the seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. That conflict is the price humanity has to pay for its elevation above the sheep and oxen which are put under its feet. It has found embodiment in many lurid and gruesome ways, and even where cruel sacrifices and degrading superstitions are unknown, it has brought thousands who know not the apostle's secret of triumph to share the poignancy of his despair—'Unhappy man that I am, who will rescue me from this death-burdened body ?'¹ It is ever true that—

They who fain would serve Thee best,
Are conscious most of wrong within.

Such consciousness may become a serious contribution to the humiliating sense of personal failure.

(vi) Yet further. Even upon the noblest minds there comes not seldom a depressing consciousness

¹ Rom. vii. 24 (Weymouth).

of limitation, both of body and of mind, which bids fair to make life intolerable. A few hours without food or sleep, and even your Sandow becomes as helpless as a babe. In our ordinary life, amidst all the best intentions and efforts, how soon we are overwhelmed with fatigue! how few things we dare attempt, how fewer things can we accomplish! One of the strongest minds of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly that of Mr. J. S. Mill. But we learn concerning him that at one period of his life, when he gave himself seriously to contemplate all that he could possibly hope to accomplish at the utmost, it seemed so paltry that it was long before he could shake off the overwhelming sense of hopeless insignificance. A life like that of Mr. W. E. Gladstone appears, during the midday of its strenuous activities, to be a wonderful exhibition of fruitful energy. But how swiftly it fades away into feebleness! A very few years suffice, even in such a case, to fulfil the poet's reflection—

We pass. The path that each man trod,
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds.
What fame is left for human deeds
In endless age? It rests with God.

For those who cannot or will not accept this last clause, there appears to be nothing but the prospect of oblivion. But can anything be more

depressing than that, to a normally constituted mind?

(vii) Yet again. The case of the great statesman just hinted at is that of the favoured few rather than of the familiar many. If the man specially endowed with robust health and vigorous mind, with added gifts of wealth and culture, and opportunities for their enjoyment extending over many years, finds it difficult to make his part on life's stage worth playing well, what of the average human being to whom few of these advantages fall? How is the man who knows himself to be but commonplace, and is daily driven to take his chance in the crushing crowd of the unprivileged and unknown, to find hope and inspiration? This, it must ever be remembered, is the type which most of all prevails. It is well for the 'aristocracy,' in body or mind or position, to descant upon the 'pleasures of life,' and extol its delightful opportunities. Unfortunately, under present social conditions, the rank and file of humanity scarcely know what these mean. Surely it is one of the most monstrous and cruel anomalies of civilization that the vast majority of our fellows should be toiling through hard, drab, dreary lives, in order that a minority may have chances of sipping life's nectar which are inevitably denied to themselves. Who would not feel inspired if, with Ruskin, we could travel luxuriously through all Europe's

fascinations of nature and art? Would not myriads of poor overworked men and women be invigorated if they could winter at Davos Platz, or escape the cutting winds of spring by a sojourn in the Riviera, or flee from the depressions of a wet summer to the sunny South of France? But these reliefs and enjoyments, we know, are for the favoured few. If amongst such, ennui and depression oft prevail, and globe-trotting millionaires find a disposition to suicide—how are the struggling many to keep heart amidst their wearing and wearying monotonies?

Besides which, speaking generally, we know that the man with five talents may find a hundred opportunities for hopeful investment where the man with only one is almost driven to go and bury his in despair. The genius has in himself a perpetual fount of impulse; but how is the average man to find hope or keep up his courage? Verily there is little enough inspiration in the thankless, ill-paid drudgery in which myriads of white slaves are compelled to drag on, week in, week out, through all the year.

(viii) This hint is, of course, an untruly mild statement of the case in regard to tragic numbers of human beings at the beginning of this century. Small need have we in Britain to lay stress upon the horrors of the Congo—devilish though they have been—as instances of ‘man’s inhumanity to

man.' In numberless cases close at hand civilization's oppressions and tyrannies not only 'make countless thousands mourn,' but crush out almost the last remnant of that sense of personal worth which constitutes the very heart of manhood. Even where the curse of sweating has not fallen, we are constantly informed that such and such a factory requires so many 'hands' to keep it going. As for the heads and hearts which might be supposed to be attached to the hands, commerce has no concern about them. And then, forsooth, not a few of the privileged ones whose heads and hearts are cultivated in luxurious mansions and parks just because their fellow men are reduced to 'hands,' profess pious horror at the 'discontent' of the age! Truly the discontent is divine. It is the content which is horrible, and the attempt to enforce it which is brutal. For such ignoble acquiescence means that the consciousness of manhood upon which Jesus laid such stress, has been lost, crushed out by superincumbent human selfishness. How many are thus led to take themselves at the estimate society puts upon them, God only knows. It is to be feared that they are vastly more than those others who may be reasonably held responsible, through their own sin and folly, for the despair which grips them in the end.

(ix) Sooner or later, however, comes to all the

resistless reminder of mortality. The callousness with which some men regard death is no proof whatever of superior knowledge or character. It may be easily exceeded by the lowest savage or the Chinese criminal, to say nothing of the brute creation. 'There are no pangs in their death, their strength is firm,' said the Psalmist concerning the same class of boasters in his day. The more a true man makes the present life to be worth living, the more is it in the noblest sense natural that he should cling to it, or desire something still worthier when his present consciousness has to be relinquished. It is a healthy sign, therefore, of genuine manhood, that men should shrink from death. The knowledge that the end of all things human is inevitable, may well come into account when we are considering what influences tend to depress men. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of 'those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' They were not for that reason either fools or weaklings. Their fear did credit to their humanity, even whilst it shadowed their happiness. So it always has been, and to a certain extent will be, whilst the human race endures. The only question is whether such feeling shall be merely sobering, or shall lead on to despair.

Now to get a true measure of the pressure on

human hearts as they are to-day made ever more sensitive by advancing education, we have to put all the foregoing items together. For it is certain as our life that they are put together in men's minds, now as never before. In face of the practical *melée* of civilization, endorsed and accentuated by philosophy's bewilderment at the mystery of pain, the modern mind is reeling into hopelessness. Let us fully face the latest deliberate utterance of Agnosticism, as partly given on a preceding page.¹

'What, are we then to be left comfortless? cry the chorus of Compensationists and Evolutionists who offer their philosophic beliefs as religious consolations to the suffering. Is there no consolation in religion or philosophy to support us in the day of trial and in the hour of death? Alas! if we take away the promises of Christianity, *there is none at all.*'

The italics are the writer's own, but the emphasis is misplaced. The insinuation that Christianity gives us only 'promises,' is sheer assumption, flatly contradicted by facts. And when the whole of the facts are truly estimated, the resultant impression is not a dark life-ground relieved by scarcely a streak of white, but a white background which is no more obliterated by the streaks of black which confessedly cross it, than the light and heat of the sun are annulled by

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, April 1908, p. 601. See p. 115 above.

the spots upon its surface. We may, therefore, echo as rationally as earnestly our late Laureate's word of cheer :

And all is well, though faith and form
Be sundered in the night of fear.
Well roars the storm to those that hear
A deeper voice across the storm.

The four excerpts from the Bible printed above are typical of its total message to humanity. They represent the 'deeper voice' above all the disheartening din of our present tumult, concerning which Jesus still says, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' This deeper voice, like the booming of a mighty bell-buoy, has many tones, undertones, and super-tones. Let us heed some of the most impressive, one by one.

(i) We are urged, alike by the Master Himself, the Psalmist and the Apostle, to begin our self-recovery by due appreciation of that which is nearest and commonest, even that which is often termed our 'lower nature.' It is not really low, but high. For there is nothing on earth so wonderful and beautiful as the normal human body. No more false or mischievous estimate could be read in public—and especially, as so often, at a funeral service—than the phrase of the old Version, 'this vile body.' It is indeed, in the language of to-day, a vile misrepresentation. No man can thought-

fully contemplate the structure of his own hand, to say nothing here of all the indescribably marvellous whole, without echoing the Psalmist's acknowledgement, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' Well might Sir Henry Thompson, summing up half a century's expert knowledge, declare that, as an Agnostic, he had been brought to 'unshakable confidence in the Power, the Wisdom, and the Beneficence which pervade and rule the Universe.'¹ Whether man was suddenly created six thousand years ago, or evolved through six thousand millions of ages, makes here no difference at all. Let a man only live such a 'godly, righteous and sober life,' as to do himself no harm, and he may continually find in his body alone enough of the marvellous, the precious, and the beautiful, to keep him from self-contempt. The liability to disease no more obliterates such value than an eclipse of the sun destroys its worth to the world. Well, therefore, was the Apostle warranted—setting aside the presumptuous interference of the copyist²—when he wrote 'Glorify God, therefore, in your body.' There is no truer way to glorify God than in the thankful recognition that the body of the humblest, when unmarred by sin, is 'the temple of the Holy Spirit,'

¹ *The Unknown God*, p. 85.

² Who added the words 'and in your spirit, which are God's' to I Cor. vi. 20.

and gives him occasion for perpetual self-esteem. Here the pauper is on a perpetual level with the prince.

(ii) We pass on to a greater marvel, and a worthier status, when we remember what the possession of mind involves. No thoughtful child, in these days, will echo the foolish superficiality which prints for the man in the street the statement that 'The brain is the mind.'¹ For if there be anything about which modern science is quite certain, it is that the brain is *not* the mind, and that mind is an unfathomable mystery. Yet the humblest hind or the poorest struggler in the slums may, if he will, herein congratulate himself that he is 'crowned with glory and honour.' And if parsons are not pleasing to him, he may receive his crown from the hands of so competent a witness as Professor Huxley, who thus estimates 'that great Alps and Andes of the living world—Man':

'Our reverence for the nobility of manhood will not be lessened by the knowledge that Man is in substance and in structure one with the brutes; for he alone possesses the marvellous endowment of intelligible and rational speech . . . so that now he stands raised upon his accumulated experience as upon a mountain-top, far above the level of his humble fellows,

¹ *Not Guilty*, by R. Blatchford, p. 95.

and transfigured from his grosser nature by reflecting here and there a ray from the infinite source of truth.'¹

More than that. The lowliest pauper may not only say with Descartes, 'I think, therefore I am' but may quote the Psalmist in addition—I am 'but little lower than God.' For accepting the testimony of latest science, as just quoted, we know of no thinker in the universe save God and ourselves. Our power to think, compared with His, is truly both infinitesimal and derived, but it is real, and it is the medium of a kinship as valid and inspiring as is the dawning consciousness of a baby prince that his father is the king supreme in the land. How then can the man who appreciates such relationship to the divine be driven even by modern cynicism into self-contempt? In his possession of mind he is, in very deed, the son of the King of kings.

(iii) There is, however, by all acknowledgement, something higher than mind. Intellectual power is one thing; moral character is another. To-day, happily, no one dare say, in respectable society, that so long as a man is clever it does not matter whether he is good. The folly which openly declares that 'there are no good and there are no bad'² needs no disproof. For it not only con-

¹ *Man's Place in Nature*, cheap edition, p. 76.

² Editor's reply in *The Clarion* to Rev. C. Noel.

tradicts itself,¹ but in putting an end to the possibility of morality it makes itself as contemptible as degrading. F. W. Robertson was immeasurably more true and worthy of regard when he wrote in his diary, 'I resolve to believe in myself, and in the powers which God has given me.' Such a resolve, no less humble than potent, is based not upon 'promises,' but upon facts equally undeniable and immeasurable. Besides God, so far as our knowledge extends, no other than man can say 'I will.' That he can and does so determine, is beyond controversy, for it is hourly consciousness. But such moral freedom marks man out from all the known universe as 'but little less than divine.' It is most of all emphasized by the gospel of Christ, in blessed and mighty contrast to the dummy philosophy which now shouts abroad that 'man cannot sin.' For if he cannot sin, assuredly he cannot love; and there is an end for ever to all possibility of making life worth living. The oft-repeated story of the Prodigal Son may well thrill the mind as well as the heart of humanity. For its philosophy is as worthy as its tenderness is manifest. The two voices here represented as coming from the penitent wanderer, do credit to his manhood more

¹ *Not Guilty*, p. 260: 'My friends, for the sake of good men who are better than their gods: for the sake of good women who are the pride and glory of the world. . . .'

than all the confident assertions of the falsely styled 'Determinism' of popular journalism. In his strong resolve—'I will arise'—there is vastly more than the soulless clatter of a mathematical machine.¹ In his heart-wrung cry 'I have sinned,' there is immeasurably more than the weird whistle of fate through the pipes of heredity and environment.

Of a truth there is in such words not merely the utterance of penitence and resolve, but the claim to a throne. The royalty of a conscience-endowed moral being, and the majesty of a veritable son of God, are all and always vividly present in such an attitude of soul. It may thus be most truly pronounced a glorious thing to be a sinner. For in knowing that he is a sinner, the man also knows that he may become a saint. The divine hall-mark is on him in the moral potentiality involved. Sin is but the abuse of that potentiality. It is the consciousness of its possession which should ever save men from self-contempt. If it were possible for a man to contemplate himself as a thing that could not sin, morally comparable to a 'steam engine' or a 'planet,'² then truly suicide might well appear as

¹ See p. 136 above—'The actions of a man's will are as mathematically fixed at his birth, as are the motions of a planet in its orbit.'—*God and My Neighbour*, by R. Blatchford, p. 136. 'Man is a creature of heredity and environment,' p. 139.

² *God and My Neighbour*, pp. 19, 136, &c.

at once the easiest and the most blameless way¹ out of the difficulties of living. But the gospel which calls him a sinner, in so doing first crowns him as a king, and then bids him, as the master of his own destiny, walk worthy of his royal estate.

(iv) 'The deeper voice' across life's storm has, however, more to say than this. The story of the Prodigal is no more the whole of the gospel than the brilliancy of one hue of the rainbow is its whole beauty. 'By the grace of God,' said the apostle, 'I am what I am.' What is this 'grace of God'? It is often, we know, upon Christian lips, enshrined in such words as 'salvation' and 'redemption.' Yet is it to be feared that here, as elsewhere, familiarity has bred something like contempt. At least in common parlance, the terms have been largely emptied of their contents. It were better to fill them again before we use them. But modern science comes to make our hand tremble as we seek to do so. It is easy enough to quote 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,'—'Ye are not your own . . . ye are bought with a price.' We know the words. But who has ever done, or will ever do, justice to their contents? The awfulness of the one assertion, and the preciousness of the other, should ever give us pause. Surely the Agnostic

¹ 'I do seriously mean, that no man is *under any circumstances* to be blamed for anything he may say or do.' Ibid. p. 137.

who here trembles into doubt because he sees so much, is nearer truth and God than the conventional hearer who, professing everything, sees little or nothing herein. What are we contemplating? God—the only and awful One, alike immanent and transcendent through all boundless realms of space and thought—giving Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, to lead a petty human life and die a shameful human death! And all to win into fellowship with Himself a tiny handful of infinitesimal creatures upon an insignificant planet! Verily, if this were not true, it would be incredible. Theories of the ‘incarnation’ and ‘atonement’ are here as unnecessary as impossible. Let us lay aside our little buckets and plumb-lines, and plainly ask, Is the ocean there, or is it not? If it be, and if it be love, assuredly—each human heart may say—it will bear my tiny craft in peace and safety.

Again. ‘Bought with a price’ is childish language indeed, in face of the overwhelming facts. But it is the best and truest speech we have. It serves at least to convey what, above all things else, we need to know. Are we poor creatures of a day contemptible, or precious, in the eyes of the Infinite One of whom nature so mysteriously mutters? The answer of Christ’s gospel is so unequivocal and comprehensive that only the strongest metaphor can express it: ‘The very hairs of your head are all numbered.’ Such a figure does not

require laboured interpretation. Let a man but catch one clear glimpse of its unmistakable meaning, and he must thenceforth do one of two things. He must either account Jesus Christ the greatest of all deceivers; or he must for ever bury all his fear, his depression, his self-contempt, in the assurance that he is more precious to the great All-Father than, to his own heart, is the little one whose arms are round his neck and for whom he would cheerfully die. Granted only that this be true, and can there be such a gospel to mortal men? This is no mocking talk about human elevation, whilst degrading manhood to mechanism. This is no robbery of our moral birthright under 'Determinedism's' pretence of setting us free from superstition. The Christian assurance of 'the grace of God,' means freedom from conscious guiltiness as to the past through forgiveness for love's sake, and freedom from sin's potency in the present through 'the expulsive power of a new affection.' These are soul realities, not theological 'promises.'

Whatever else may be said concerning the tragedy of Calvary, so long as the Gospels are of any value as a record, we have the sublimest of paradoxes before our eyes, in that, according to His own testimony, Jesus was both free and yet under supreme obligation to die. With that the whole of the New Testament is in clear accord. It is put equally beyond controversy that in some

real sense He died for us, i.e. for all humanity. Here we may well waive the mystery in order to appreciate the fact. Precisely why and how He should die for men, may be postponed. The overwhelming truth is that it was on behalf of human nature, as an absolute necessity and yet as a perfectly voluntary self-sacrifice. The very least then, that can be learned from the whole transaction is the divine estimate of the worth of human nature. Upon this the appeal of Peter's letter is based: 'Knowing that ye were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold—but with precious blood—even the blood of Christ.' Whether theology be new or old, if there be no meaning in those words, the worth of the New Testament is at an end. But if there be meaning, then it must be not that we are somewhat 'lower than the angels,' but as much nearer to the heart of God as the writer to the Hebrews implies in his saying that 'verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham.' The true summary, therefore, of the Christian inspiration is in familiar words—'He who did not withhold even His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will He not also with Him freely give us all things?' It is, of course, open to any man to scorn the whole conception. If so, he takes his own responsibility, and suffers his own loss. But the man to whom

it is in any degree real and true, can never thereafter think of himself with self-contempt, nor need he ever give way to despair.

(v) Such reflection is, however, far from conveying the whole stimulus of Christian faith. Christianity speaks not only of a crucified but of a risen Saviour, and affirms that He is not more plainly absent in bodily form than He is represented by a real and everlasting Presence. 'It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Advocate will not come; but if I depart I will send Him unto you, that He may abide with you for ever.' Until the Fourth Gospel is proved to be nothing more than the pious imagination of some second-century mystic, that assurance remains as firm as the fact of the Crucifixion, as true as the reality of the Resurrection. It points unmistakably to the surest, nearest, tenderest, channel of the grace of God to men.

According to this gospel the earth is not more really enswathed in the atmosphere which envelops it, than is each human soul by the tender, pitiful, patient, and potent ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus every man, as man, is always in touch with God. He may ignore that touch or welcome it. He may spurn it, or yield himself to its upward pressure. Yet is it ever upon him. The assurance of the reality of such an Advocate, Teacher, Comforter, Friend in need, cannot but

be to every man who is willing to be helped, the unspeakable reminder of his worth to God. As such, it should bring him immeasurable comfort, and thrill him with unquenchable inspiration. If, every hour of every day, God is Himself pressing on my spiritual nature as really, though also as gently, as the atmosphere is always putting its fifteen-pounds' pressure on each square inch of my body, how can I ever account myself a mere mammalian vertebrate, a profitless struggler with blind forces, a poor puppet of fate, a bubble about to lose itself in the ocean, and nothing more? If there were no Holy Spirit, that might be. But if He is, that can never be.

(vi) Last, though far from least, there is also to be considered the Christian promise of the future. The love of God, the self-sacrifice of Jesus, the influence of the Holy Spirit, one might say, with equal reverence and truth, would be wasted over a creature which merely passed from nothing to nothing across the transient flash of mortality. In uttermost contrast to this, Christ's gospel bids men think of a future beyond the grave, which may be, if they will, so real and sweet and noble and blessed, as to make all earth's tribulation seem but an April cloud speedily giving way to the glorious sunlit blue. This is, we frankly acknowledge, a 'promise.' But it is not, as such, necessarily to be despised. Of that sublime hope which we call

'heaven,' it is no doubt equally true that believers have said too much and thought too little. As a mere religious supposition, gaudily painted in unreal verbosity by pietistic sentimentalism, it is worth nothing and counts for nothing in the present fight of life. But as a sober and well-grounded hope, translated by reverent thought into modern terms, it not only calls for our highest appreciation, but becomes the reliable foundation of a comfort and inspiration which are alike inexpressible and measureless.

When modern naturalism coarsely claims our thanks for its boasted disproof of any more future after death for a man than a moth, it does but add insult to injury. Happily its findings are as unwarranted as they are unworthy.¹ Latest psychological science tends as really to confirm as to purify the Christian hope. The expectation of the sensible and diligent boy at school, that before long he will be out in a larger world at his father's side, doing nobler service, is not more valid, and should not be more influential, than the assurance of the man who has truly learned of Jesus Christ to estimate himself aright, as he contemplates his higher destiny when death's dark tunnel shall have been passed through. Why should any poor struggler with difficulties or fighter for the right

¹ For justification of such assertion see the present writer's *Haeckel's Monism False*, ch. vi.

lose heart, if he has good grounds for his belief that when he has been faithful unto death there awaits him 'the crown of life'? The least meaning of such a promise, on such authority, is that all the true and good and noble and blessed for which he has here contended, will be ensured to him in ever-increasing measure without end. He may not talk of it every day to every one, any more than of the ground beneath his feet. But it will be as firmly, even if as silently, the sure foundation of his daily confidence.

(vii) Indeed the only dimness with which the modern atmosphere can tarnish the Christian hope, is by means of doubt as to its reliability. No particular clearness of brain or largeness of heart is required to pronounce such a promise a delusion. It is beautiful enough, say not a few, but it is not true. Well, that is at least a matter for discussion. Elsewhere such may be undertaken with good cheer, but the briefer and more practical Christian method is to offer us a pledge of what is naturally undemonstrable. The gospel of Jesus teaches us to make heaven now, as a veritable spiritual entity, by means of personal character, and then asks us what there is in death to destroy such an entity, or to prevent its development beyond all our present powers of conception. One certainty which nothing can shake is that the heaven of the hereafter, to be

heaven, must be character. Here and now it is equally certain that character is not dependent upon the body, nor upon health, nor wealth, nor any of the things which to the superficial many constitute life's essence. Any human home, we know, can even now be made a heaven or a hell, independently of size, or income, or situation. Character can make a cottage into a Paradise, and a palace into a Pandemonium. Every Christian, at least, knows—whether he does it or not—how he may make a miniature heaven round about him day by day. God be thanked, in myriads of cases it is so actual as to constitute in itself a true and sufficient pledge of the heaven to come. There is nothing in death to touch, let alone destroy, it. No further assurance is needed, even as no surer guarantee can be given. When indeed the mourner murmurs amid his tears—

For this alone on death I wreak
The wrath that garners in my heart.
He put our lives so far apart,
We cannot hear each other speak—

his loss must be acknowledged to be both true and sad. All human hearts go out to him in sympathy. Yet it would be sadder if it were not true. For love which cared not for separation would be mockery. Here, again, the Christian hope avails, for it assures our hearts that the separation is but for a while. So are we doubly 'saved by hope.' First from

self-contempt, which might well attach to creatures knowing themselves merely born to die. Then also from the despair which would be justified if our loved ones were not only gone before but lost.

Enough. One clear note alone remains to be added, even that with which the apostle made at once so tender and solemn his leave-taking of the church at Ephesus: 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' To realize for oneself all the foregoing reasons for Christian encouragement, is unmeasured benediction. But to translate it also to others, is still greater blessedness. The first stage of Christian inspiration is undoubtedly to cheer our own heart by putting together in fair, clear, careful synthesis, all these enheartening principles, for they are not merely true but cumulative. The hall-mark of God upon the beneficent marvels of our bodily frame; the unparalleled possession of wondrous powers of mind; the inalienable sense of moral freedom, in the consciousness of wrong and the potentiality for right; the unmistakable expression on God's own part of His estimate of human nature's worth in the whole work of Jesus for our redemption; the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in daily communion with mankind as with no other creature; the hope, made certain by the word of

the eternal Christ, of an inheritance hereafter, compared with which all earth's best joys are poor and small ; the pledge of that coming heaven, here and now, in the miniature yet real God-likeness which is attainable and attained in every age by myriads of disciples,—these are the realities which make men royal as no earthly monarch ever was or will be. How in face of all this, be the modern influences around him as depressing as they may, can the genuine Christian lose heart of hope, concerning either himself or his life, his duty or his destiny ?

But in the very degree in which such hope and inspiration come to himself, he is bound to desire that they should come to others also. It is blessed to receive such consolation ; it is yet more blessed to impart it. Such greater blessedness, however, is not lightly won. It is to be feared that there are hosts of modern professing Christians in all the Churches, who know no more of this than schoolboys do of quaternions.

It is easy enough to belittle and depress our human surroundings. Any one, without any care or pains, can spread discomfort and self-depreciation. Any small soul can make his friends feel smaller. We have but to let ourselves go in peevish irritability, or selfish indulgence, or mawkish moping, or uncharitable gossip, to become walking wet blankets of depression in any home, or church, or community. To go forth as a cold and dreary

human fog, striking a chill through every one whom we meet, will cost us nothing. But to be genuine children of light, diffusing radiance and comfort and hope all around our path, making all whom we meet feel greater and brighter and stronger for good—that will cost us much. We shall have to know something of the experience of Jesus when, in healing one poor sufferer, we are told that He ‘knew well that healing power had gone from within Him.’ It was just the sense of cost, in higher degree, which is meant in our ordinary saying concerning some special effort on the part of a great artist or preacher, that it ‘took it out of him.’ Probably that is the sad yet true reason why much more of actual philanthropy is not personally done.

Such power to bless and save doubtless means that we must first learn from the love that issued in Calvary, and in the face of the risen Christ, our own lesson of holy self-esteem, and treat ourselves as beloved children of the God of love. But then, as surely as the smallest mirror in the sun reflects the light, it becomes at once our noblest power and highest privilege to inspire others with the same assurance of hope. Not always, of course, by religious words alone, but in never-failing behaviour. By character, conduct, acts, looks, which cheer and inspire, making all who meet or know us to feel themselves uplifted, ennobled, strengthened—it

may become continually possible to be what the Master said He was and we should be—‘the light of the world.’ In nothing more surely can a father bless his children, or a teacher help his class, or a friend ennoble his friend,¹ than by thus impressing them with a sense of their own human dignity, their unmeasured superiority to all surrounding creatures, their unspeakable preciousness in the eyes of the Infinite Father. He who truly and deeply holds this conviction for himself is possessed of the pearl of great price. He who leads others to similar conviction, at once enhances his own blessedness, and blesses them beyond all earth’s other possibilities of enrichment. No Christian principle, therefore, can be more worthy or timely than that embodied in the prayer :—

O strengthen me, that, while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a helping hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.

O give Thine own sweet rest to me,
That I may speak with soothing power,
A word in season, as from Thee,
To weary ones in needful hour.

¹ ‘A man could not know Forbes for long and not be quickly conscious of a new sense of the value of himself which made him believe that his own personality and life were things of great importance. Many of us, conscious in ourselves of very ordinary attainments, of weaknesses of character, learnt from him that, in spite of all this, our personality was God’s greatest gift to us.’—*Letters to his Friends*—brief memoir of Forbes Robinson, late Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge.

VIII

THE BLIGHT OF UNBELIEF

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

PS. xi. 3.

Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.

JOHN viii. 24 (Weymouth).

Having no hope, and without God in the world.

EPH. ii. 12.

Remember that in the last days men will come who make a mock at everything—men governed only by their own passions, and asking, What has become of His promised return? For from the time our forefathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have been ever since the creation of the world.

2 PET. iii. 3 (Weymouth).

IT has become a commonplace that ours is an age of doubt and questioning, but the extent to which this temper prevails, and the degree to which it is affecting men's minds in regard to Christian faith throughout all those countries which have hitherto been pronounced Christian, is only dimly apprehended by the ordinary believer. Members and adherents of churches are generally enveloped in an atmosphere of religious conventionality, and are trained to perfect contentment with the ceaseless assumptions of public worship. Hence, equally in the pulpit and the pew, there is for the most part

complete unconsciousness of outer influences and tendencies; whilst a policy of wise reticence, or severe silence, is regarded as the spiritually proper attitude to be adopted towards all forms of modern opposition to Christian sanctions. He who ventures to think otherwise, is quickly pronounced pessimistic and controversial. Any attempts on his part to bring about a prudent appreciation of recent developments affecting Christian thought, even though these be patent and important, will bring him scanty thanks from the majority of his fellow believers. In all probability he will only be credited with intellectual pugnacity, and deemed lacking in spirituality.

But the actualities of modern criticism, cynicism, indifference, opposition, remain, whether they are heeded or not. It is unquestionably a cheering sign of the times that with few exceptions the great branches of the Protestant Church are being drawn together with kindlier sympathy, whilst larger charity is characterizing evangelical theology and social regeneration is becoming more and more recognized as an integral part of Christian spirituality. The good work done also in many large Missions in the great city centres, both religiously and practically, deserves the utmost appreciation. But all this, taken at its best and utmost, does not diminish let alone contradict the fact that an attitude of mind distinctly opposed to

all that Christian churches hold for true, is not only prevalent but increasing, in modern European populations. If we confine our attention for the present to Great Britain, we shall be dealing undoubtedly with the region most favourable to Christian sanctions, and therefore yielding conclusions even more seriously applicable to the rest of Western civilization.

The usual policy of attempting to hush up or ignore the amount and seriousness of modern unbelief, is as unhelpful as fatuous. There may be many grades of gloom from the first failing of the sunshine, through twilight, on to midnight. But no one of them is brightened by pretending that it is still undimmed day. Nor can any of the many degrees of to-day's disinclinations towards Christian faith—from the theology which is now technically termed 'new,' through the varying strata of Anglicized German criticism, on to the outspoken contentions against everything Christian now poured forth from a 'Rationalist Press Association' and anti-Christian Socialist journals—be in the least mitigated by the orthodox process of ignoring them and affecting to deem them all but exceptional trifles in the modern world. Every honest thinker outside religious conservatories knows well that they are not trifles. When, moreover, to the influences which are directly antagonistic to all Christian faith there are added others

scarcely less detrimental because indirect, the situation calls for even more thorough consideration. It were difficult, indeed, to say which is farther removed from the Christian ideal, the utter sensational indifference of the bulk of the poorest classes, or the selfish and luxurious conventionalities of the wealthiest. It is at least certain that neither of these sections of modern society is likely to be moved towards the doctrine and practice of the New Testament by the cultured logomachies which appear in our leading intellectual Reviews; nor by the nebulous euphemisms which serve to express the conventional patronage of religion by daily newspapers; nor yet by the flippant generalities if not sinister innuendoes, which occasionally relieve the usual contempt exhibited by the bulk of fashionable novels, in regard to Christian sentiments.

Belief is itself, one must acknowledge, a very varying quantity. To seek in a few words to describe and estimate all the differing kinds and degrees of Christian conviction, would be a task as useless as impossible. Every church, every writer, every preacher, must speak from some standpoint. It will both prevent confusion and contribute to desired emphasis, if we plainly state that the standard of Christian faith here contemplated is that of the modern evangelical doctrine which is as far removed from the Calvinism of the past,

as from that which calls itself 'The New Theology' in the present. Both these may have their good points, and may honestly satisfy their adherents. They are simply not considered here. The belief whose loss we characterize as a human 'blight,' may thoughtfully modify but has no desire to fling away the main doctrines which used to be called 'orthodox,' for these constitute its very foundations. At the same time it is quite broad enough to say with John Wesley: 'Men may die without any opinions and yet be carried into Abraham's bosom, but if we be without love, what will knowledge avail? I will not quarrel with you about opinions; only see that your heart be right towards God, and that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and love your neighbours, and walk as your Master walked, and I ask no more. I am sick of opinions. Give me good and substantial religion—a humble, gentle love of God and man.'

It is concerning such faith as is thus expressed, that the four following assertions are made. It is more fraught with comforting and ennobling influence, with wise guidance and strong inspiration, than any other religion or philosophy. The modern atmosphere is unmistakably tending to weaken if not destroy it. The effect of this tendency is, in the degree to which it obtains, a real blight upon all that is noblest and best in

human life. It should, therefore, be watched and prevented from developing, as carefully and earnestly as any other blight which would spoil earth's fairest flowers or sweetest fruit. Each of these assertions merits the best attention every honest and earnest mind can give it.

1. When it is understood that we speak with a wide margin of sympathy for other varieties of Christian belief, we may say unhesitatingly that the evangelical Christian faith, as held by so many in these realms, represents the very truest and best that has come or can come to humanity in the name of religion. It is an inspiration, whether in face of friend or foe, to consider all that is involved in the acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as thus conceived. When the genuine Christian is confronted with the questions of popular unbelief in this regard he is as able as willing to answer them. Such, for instance, as these. 'You speak of the spiritual value of your religion,' says one of the most vigorous of opponents; 'what can it give you more than Socrates or Buddha possessed? These men had wisdom, courage, morality, fortitude, love, mercy. Can you find in all the world to-day two men as wise, as good, as gentle, as happy?'¹ Christianity were a poor thing indeed, if we could not respond to such a challenge. Queries like these

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, p. 172.

may perhaps be honestly put by one who boasts that he has had nothing to do with the inner life of any church for many years. But imperfect as modern Christian churches may be, those who live inside them yet know that Professor Seeley's estimate was measurably below the facts when he said : ' Perhaps the truth is that there has scarcely been a town in any Christian country since the time of Christ without exhibiting a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself. And if this be so, has Christ failed ? or can Christianity die ? ' There are tens of thousands of such in modern Christendom, though they are not likely to send their names and addresses to the editor of *The Clarion*. They would be the last to proclaim themselves superior to Socrates or Buddha ; but both the truths which they prove in their own experience, and the principles which they seek to impart to others, are as much greater and better than the pessimism of the latter and the uncertainty of the former, as day is brighter and warmer than dawn.

Observe that the question here is not whether we should accept the Christ of the Gospels or not. The present inquiry is, What if we do ? The ordinary believer is asked in the name of modern anti-Christian Humanism, ' Do you not *know*, as a

matter of fact, that it is as well in this world and shall be as well hereafter with a good Buddhist, or Jew, or Agnostic, as with a good Christian? ' ¹ To which we may answer unhesitatingly, that we do not 'know' anything of the kind. But if we leave the hereafter, as well we may, in His hands of whom it is said, 'The Father hath committed all judgement unto the Son,' we may affirm with all careful boldness that it is *not* 'as well in this world' with *any* man 'as with a good Christian.' The briefest summary of the gain of godliness will here suffice, because it will admit of truthful elaboration at other times. * So far from being pledged to 'otherworldliness' as a justification of faith, the actual benediction of belief—what the apostle called 'the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ'—would remain unsullied even if for the moment we suppose that there is no hereafter at all. ²

In order to justify such an assertion let us

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, p. 172.

² It may be well to point out here that the familiar words of the apostle so often read in public, and even found in the Revised Version, are quite unwarranted and misleading. Paul did not say, 'If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are more to be pitied than all men,' but, 'if here and now we have *only hoped*'—when we both desire and need something more than hope to give us a well-grounded faith. The context also plainly shows that the contrast here is not between this life and the life to come at all, but between a mere hope and an assurance based on fact, by reason of which we may say, '*knowing* that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more.'

recount, so far as a few words can, all those factors of daily life, within and without, which accrue from a genuine belief that the Christ of the New Testament is to be trusted as Teacher, Master, Saviour to the uttermost.

First, to speak negatively, there is happy deliverance alike from the ancient pessimism of Buddha or Koheleth, and from the modern nightmares of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Strauss, and Haeckel, with their English echoes. 'This sense of abandonment,' wrote Strauss, 'is something awful.' And it was a fair as well as honest estimate, if man be nothing more than a 'helpless and defenceless creature' who may at any time be crushed without hope beneath the 'ponderous stamps and hammers' of the universe. 'Man now sees in the universe at large no shadow of support for that promise of unending life he has entertained so long. From end to end of it comes only the whisper of death.' So writes now, with cheerful modesty, Haeckel's henchman in this country.¹ Mercifully there are other voices, even from science and philosophy, which merit quite as much regard in their contradiction of these melancholy strains.² But, for the sincere

¹ *Haeckel's Critics Answered*, p. 61. See, for reply to this, *Haeckel's Monism False*, by the present writer, chs. ii. and vi.

² See Sir Oliver Lodge's *Life and Matter*, also *Hibbert Journal* for April 1908, respecting the immortality of the soul. Also *Theism True*, by the present writer.

Christian, there is another voice which, with greater authority, says to him, 'Peace, be still.' Christ being what He claims to be, has transcendent warrant for saying, 'Let not your heart be troubled : believe in God, believe also in Me.' When that enheartenment is heeded, the Christian disciple is saved from being driven, with Buddha, to regard life as such an incurable evil that salvation consists only in escaping from it to a passionless Nirvana which is, in spite of all contrary protest, indistinguishable from extinction. To 'believe in God,' is for him the assurance of the real love of a Heavenly Father, whose guiding providence is not disproved by life's seeming contradictions, but who deserves to be trusted even in the dark.

Again, the voice of conscience within, which refuses to be stifled by the mechanical superficialities of a falsely-named 'Determinism,' and arraigns the soul on many a charge of wrong done and right left undone, yet finds real peace in face of the unalterable past, through the forgiving love which at once exhibits and sacrifices itself on Calvary. Full well the human heart knows, whatever the shallow softnesses of some modern speech, that a God who is not to be feared, cannot be loved. But the reasons for both awe and love so fuse in the cross of Jesus Christ, that the power to sin—the very hall-mark of manhood as distinct from bruteness—becomes transformed into the

energy of goodness : 'If any man be in Christ there is a new creation.' Such a word is no pious fancy. It is human fact, experienced and demonstrated unnumbered times.

It is accompanied, moreover, no less distinctly, by acceptance of the very highest standard of character. This is truly and for ever enshrined in the word at which opponents scoff and from which mere adherents shrink,¹ but which reverent thought endorses, and genuine faith with open eyes recognizes as the noblest ideal of personal relationship towards God and man that has ever been presented for human emulation. 'Holiness' may be misrepresented in doctrine and cartooned in practice, but when justice is done to the whole New Testament ideal enshrined in the word 'holy,' no man can despise it without despising also all that is noblest in himself and in humanity. Nor is this a mere counsel of mystic perfection, admirable but unattainable. The ceaseless inspiration which for Christian faith inseparably accompanies the high ideal, is best expressed by one who nobly embodied both : 'We make it our highest ambition, whether we live or die, to be accepted of Him.' Inexpressible in words, and liable to the scoffs of every superficial

¹ For answer to the popular sneers poured upon Christian holiness by such writers as Mr. R. Blatchford and Mr. Belfort Bax, see *Clarion Fallacies*, by the present writer, p. 192, and for an outline of the truth concerning it see *Christian Essentials*, ch. vii.

opponent, the love of Christ yet becomes so truly the unfailing dynamic of Christian faith, that he who lacks it can in no other way maintain his discipleship.

With this there comes also another character-reality which eludes all defining, but appeals as surely to the observation of others as to personal consciousness. There were obvious and worthy reasons why, at the outset of Christian effort, numbers of opponents, however cynical, were driven to say to one another, 'These men have been with Jesus.' A similarly gracious and noticeable effect undoubtedly ought to follow in the case of every believer, modern as well as ancient. The many failures which cannot be denied, do not affect the ideal of what ought to be. The natural and spiritual effect of the Christian dynamic 'working within through love,' is to create an atmosphere of 'sweetness and light' which is just as applicable to the commonplaces of daily living as to the sacred secrecies of personal experience. Communion with God is none the less actual because it is utterly untranslatable into the phrases of modern journalism. But as connected with and radiating from such spiritual reality, there is an experience of the purifying, deepening, intensifying, enlarging, of human love which cannot but make itself unspeakably felt, in the degree to which each individual is Christian indeed. A truly

Christian home is for this reason distinct from any non-Christian home, however moral, refined, and cultured this latter may be. There is in such an atmosphere a spiritual fragrance, as invisible yet as perceptible as that of violets. It was concerning this that Tennyson wrote :

Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure.
What souls possess themselves so pure ?
Or is there blessedness like theirs ?

Those who have lived in this atmosphere will not require any definition of it. Those who have not, could not, in spite of all their resentful protests,¹ apprehend what is both true and intended, from any amount of reasoned descriptions.

Still less would such 'humanists' appreciate the difference between pain and sorrow, with and without the grace of God. Yet is it, even on Strauss's confession, as real as that between the pain of a child soothed by a Father's love and the woe of an orphan in bitter loneliness. Christian philosophy neither professes to explain all earth's mysteries of suffering, nor certainly to regard pain as other than painful in itself and tragic in amount. Yet

¹ As in the chapter on Spiritual Discernment in *God and My Neighbour*, e.g. : 'I protest against this mystical transcendental rhetoric. It is not argument.' As if love, whether to God or man, ever was proved or disproved or expressed by argument ! 'I love,' may or may not be rhetoric, but 'argument' it certainly is not.

it does offer such consolation and provide such grounds for patience, that out of the conflict with pain and sorrow there may emerge characters measurelessly nobler than could ever be created in a world full of untroubled bipeds whose sleek bodies were matched with baby minds and the self-centred hearts of lotus-eaters. Every succeeding generation has endorsed the wise words of comfort addressed to the Hebrew Christians of old : ' No discipline at the time seems to be joyful but grievous, but afterwards it brings by way of recompense to those who have thus been thoroughly trained, the peace-creating fruit of noble character.' And even a money-making, pleasure-craving age like the present, cannot deny the unmeasured superiority of such a result. Nor does the strange modern cult which calls itself Christian Science but is really neither scientific nor Christian, provide any substitute for the character-effect of the discipline it professes to scorn. It is as false to represent pain to be the greatest evil on earth, as it is alike unscientific and unchristian to pronounce death an ' illegitimate monstrosity.' A holy character is a far nobler result than a painless animal, and if Christ be true, for every man who has proved that, ' to die is gain.'

Again, Christian faith also guarantees that in death, such noble character will not be lost. Here Browning does but echo the truth.

There shall never be one lost good !

What was, shall live as before ;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;

What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much
good more ;

On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven a perfect
round.

Whilst Christ remains his Lord and Guide, the believer is not left, with Socrates, to wonder and to wait. He has what Socrates never dreamt of in his keenest questions, a well-grounded assurance that 'the best is yet to be.' 'Were it not so, I would have told you,' is all-sufficient, though scanty in its response to our curiosity. It is enough that in the once crucified but risen Christ, the true Christian finds the double comfort for which all that is highest in his nature craves. Death is robbed of its terrors for himself, no less than of its sting as a hopeless wrecker of human loves. 'The desire to depart and be with Christ,' as something 'very far better' than earth's best, is a fair summary of what is actually affirmed concerning the awaiting life. But its comfort and inspiration are measureless, whether for ourselves or those who have gone before. Compared with this, the vapourings of Naturalism about unconsciously joining a 'choir invisible,' or sweetly falling into 'an endless sleep,' are but mocking mirages arranged in meaningless verbosity. As the brightness of a sunlit dawn after a dreary night,

comes the simple yet comprehensive Christian assurance—

Then shall I see and hear and know,
All I desired and wished below ;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.

2. It must be frankly confessed that all the above, together with all the comfort or hope thereby suggested, depend for their worth upon the validity of the foundations of Christianity. The modern attempt in some quarters to find a sufficient warrant for such Christian sanctions in personal experience alone, merits the disdain with which thoughtful opponents reject it. It is but to aim at moving a vast mass with a long lever that rests on no fulcrum. The last issued work of any import against Christian faith is thus quite in order when it utters its protest. 'To say that the real historic evidences of the Resurrection lie in the lives of those who know that Christ lives in them, is to confuse two wholly different kinds of evidence and throw the question into obscurity.'¹ Belief in such case becomes a mere castle in the air, quite inadequate as a shelter from the storms of actual human sin and sorrow. There must be basis in solid fact, if Christian hope is to be valid. What we are concerned to know, therefore, is the effect of the waves of modern investigation upon

¹ *The First Easter Dawn*, by C. T. Gorham, p. ix.

this foundation. Nor can any more serious question be propounded to a sincere and thoughtful mind.

In the summarized reply which must here suffice, it may be said that the processes of modern thought begin, rightfully enough, with the application of our better acquaintance with facts and fairer inferences from them, to previously held religious conceptions. Hence we find, first, modified theories concerning the nature and inspiration of the Bible, arising from the plain presence of minor inaccuracies which former theories declared to be impossible. These, with other critical difficulties quite unimportant in themselves, are forced into prominence on the one hand by the ignorant fear of some believers,¹ and on the other by the embittered prejudice of some unbelievers. Thus is the notion only too easily diffused that the value and authority of the Bible are undermined. Numerous, plausible, and rancorous, are the publications of unbelief which seek to enforce such a conclusion. Again ; the wider acquaintance of science to-day with all forms of sentient life and the struggle for existence, is added to the larger knowledge of human sorrow

¹ I regret to have to protest here against the foolish and cowardly practice—all too well known to me—of sending anonymous letters, under the guise of special Christian zeal, but often with coarse and insulting language, to any Christian teacher who herein speaks the truth. The theory which occasions such proceeding condemns itself. If Christianity needed such defence the world would be well rid of it.

and suffering, as an impeachment of the doctrine of divine Providence. The Fatherhood of God is said 'in face of a knowledge of life and the world,' to be but 'the baseless shadow of a wistful human dream.'¹ In academic quarters psychology and metaphysics are invoked, as showing that moral responsibility is no longer thinkable. This is easily translated into popular language by the loud assertion that sin is now shown to be impossible, and that therefore all Christianity, with its message of forgiveness, is based upon delusion. Even in sections of society which shrink from such wild fallacies, there is a growing disposition to dismiss almost all former thought concerning the import of the death of Jesus, and set aside the reality of His resurrection, simply permitting the possibility of His continued existence in the unknown world. These and other suggestions of 'the new theology' are directly associated with the rejection of the Fourth Gospel, either as the work of the apostle John or as historically reliable. In other directions, where men still claim to be Christian, although 'advanced,' the Synoptic Gospels as well as the Fourth are dissected, and the greater part cast away on the plea that the supernatural element must be false in any case. Hence, of course, not merely the deity but the superhumanness of Christ, is dissolved out of

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, p. 76.

further consideration. As a final touch, with intent to blot out the last traces of the fading picture of Christian belief, comes the lurid fog of resuscitated mythology from the midst of which we are informed that the Christ of the Gospels never lived at all, the accounts we possess being merely a conglomeration of sun-myths gathered as accretions around some obscure Jew of preceding centuries.

To most readers of these pages, maybe, all this will appear nothing more than the ravings of sheer mental and moral madness. They will perhaps echo the poet's suggestion—

You say, but with no touch of scorn,
Sweethearted you whose light blue eyes
Are tender over drowning flies,
You tell me doubt is devil-born.

But whether we are mild or severe in our estimates, all the above are not simply constituents of the modern religious atmosphere, but operative and influential constituents. It is easy enough to pooh-pooh them in law-protected assemblies and popular religious literature, but they remain none the less real, active, and potent. Forty years ago the Bishop of Oxford avowed that doubt was everywhere. Now it is vastly more so. Of all the foolish suggestions of well-meaning believers scarcely one can be named more deluded and deluding than the not uncommon query whether religious difficulties are not disseminated by pulpit efforts to

meet them. An hour's inspection of the nearest Free Library or railway bookstall, is quite sufficient answer to such Rip van Winkle imaginations.

The plain truth is that we are face to face with such social facts and such mental influences as have never before confronted the Christian Church ; and these are certain to increase rather than decrease in their antagonistic effect, with the progress of the twentieth century. Nothing, therefore, can be more timely than a fair estimate of the effect of all this modern turmoil upon human nature in general, as well as upon Christian thought and life, together with ensuing considerations touching the position and attitude of convinced believers.

3. In order to be as far removed as possible from the exaggerated sentimentalism and unwarranted inferences sometimes issuing from the pulpit and press,¹ we will here aim at estimating the smallest rather than greatest effect that must follow, if men are driven to the conclusion that the faith of our fathers is altogether null and void. And the very least that can be said is that such a nemesis of Christian belief as seems to be largely in progress, must act as an insidious but deadly

¹ As in the recent production entitled *When it was Dark*, as foolish an instance of inflated and sensational religious fiction as was ever put on paper. The fact that such a work could receive the public imprimatur of a bishop, might well make believers blush ; whilst unbelievers are but confirmed in their scornful attitude towards a faith represented as needing such defence.

blight upon all that is highest and noblest in human nature. The perception of such inevitable results has called forth sometimes the pathetic lament,¹ sometimes the indignant repudiation,² of unbelief. The reasons for such differing estimates may partly be found in heredity and environment. We will endeavour here to summarize such effects of the modern slight on Christian sanctions as are largely if not wholly independent of temperament, and should be beyond controversy for reasonable minds.

It is a serious indictment to bring against any process of thought, that it tends inevitably towards the reduction, if not extinction, of human comfort, elevation, inspiration, and hope. But this, and nothing less, must be maintained in regard to that reduction of Christianity to a vanishing point

¹ 'So far as the ruination of individual happiness is concerned, no one can have a more lively perception than myself of the possibly disastrous tendency of my work. I am not ashamed to confess that with this virtual negation of God, the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness. When at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible.'—Prof. Romanes, when the author of the anti-theistic *Candid Examination of Theism*. See his *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 28.

² 'Some of us have come through the solemn realities of life and have not realized that Christianity is true. We are as happy as our even Christian; we are as good as our even Christian; we are as benevolent as our even Christian; what has Christianity to offer us?'—*God and My Neighbour*, p. 171.

which is the avowed aim of many earnest workers in this age, and the apparent end to which certain tides of thought are tending. In order to be clear rather than dramatic, and true to fact as distinct from sensational, let us take the chief elements of the case in fair enumeration.

A cultured Agnostic wrote not long since in a leading Review¹ that 'Communion with a personal God, of whose existence no doubt is entertained, is best for some people, and will for long centuries continue to produce some of the finest fruits of our civilization.' If this be true, the loss of it is proportionately great. It can scarcely be questioned that the meditations of the noblest of the Psalms, especially when enhanced by the teaching of Jesus concerning God, do give not only what Prof. Clifford termed 'refined pleasure,' but a great deal more. They represent the loftiest thoughts and purest emotions of which human nature is capable. The discovery that all these, in all past ages, have been sheer self-delusion—as much so as the ravings of a lunatic—could not but be an unmeasured shock to every higher faculty in man which manifestly lifts him above the animal.

With such discovery, of course, must also go all thought of prayer. All humanity must, in such case, come to the flippant conclusion of the

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, July 1905, p. 677.

superficial Agnosticism which boasts, 'For myself I never pray, and never feel the need of prayer.'¹ How such a principle would work in regard to other things, such as reading, or thinking, or washing, a child can see. But a world that never washed, and so never felt the need of washing, would be physically a fair analogy to a world of human beings who in their ultra-physical nature never thought of anything higher than themselves, or desired any higher sanctions than their own sensations. The whole religious history of humanity, even in its dark mistakes, witnesses to the blight upon its noblest potentialities and atrophy of its loftiest capacities which would follow from the universal dismissal of prayer as wasted time and energy.

Certainly with the loss of Christian faith goes also the loss of the sublimest reason for personal comfort and happiness that can influence a human heart. Modern disbelief assures the people that 'the Christian conception of God as a Heavenly Father is a very lofty, poetical, and gratifying conception, but it is open to one fatal objection—it is not true.'² But the estimate of the doctrine here given, is as inadequate as its contradiction is dogmatic. The Fatherhood of God is to the Christian heart much more than 'lofty, poetical,

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, p. 81.

² *Ibid*: p. 73.

and gratifying.' It is the sheet-anchor of all his deepest comfort, his brightest happiness, his surest hope. No words of any religion on earth are as full of inspiring significance as those of Christ—'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' Grant that, and then there is reason to sing,

More dear than life itself, Thy love
My heart and tongue shall still employ,
And to declare Thy praise will prove
My peace, my glory, and my joy.

Such words are no mere rhapsody. They are the true representation of the undercurrent of myriads upon myriads of lives which otherwise would be but weary gropings in a darkness that can be felt. Nor would such darkness be at all dissipated by guaranteeing to every individual a full stomach, a fine house, resplendent clothing, and robust health, every day of his life. In many a home where all these are found, but where some dearly loved one is missing, the blighting of human happiness would be as hopeless as unspeakable without Christ's comforting assurance. It would also be typical of that which must come upon every human soul who has 'trusted God was love indeed,' if it were shown that his trust rested only upon vacuity.

How, indeed, is a man to preserve anything like the same self-respect when, as a substitute for his lost hope, he not only learns from the ancient Persian cynic—

And that inverted bowl we call the Sky
 Whereunder crawling coopt we live and die,
 Lift not thy hands to it for help—for It
 Rolls impotently on as thou or I,

but this also is endorsed by his modern admirers :

And if the wine you drink, the lip you press
 End in the nothing all things end in—yes—
 Then fancy while thou art, thou art but what
 Thou shalt be—nothing—thou shalt not be less.¹

The creature who knows himself to have come from nothing, to be nobody, and to be going nowhere, must work a miracle in very deed before he can deem himself worthy of a second thought.

Further, the whole true estimate of human nature and human life becomes then equally paltry, when calmly considered. Tall talk indeed we may have, plentifully enough, from the scornors of faith. Here is a fair specimen.

‘Brief and powerless is man’s life ; on him and all his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way ; for man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day ; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate for a moment his knowledge and his condemnation,

¹ Omar Khayyám, lii. xlvii.

to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.'¹

What are these 'lofty thoughts' and what this 'proud defiance' but aggravated and contemptible mockery, if this be the whole human case? Surely the poet is nearer the truth here than the man of science. If this be man's best and utmost—

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music matched with him.

For it is not merely a question of destiny. Quality of life, as well as quantity, demands consideration. Is man man, or thing? Is he moral, or non-moral? Has he capacity for character, or is he characterless as a marionette? Some there are, we know, who here rush in where angels—or metaphysicians and psychologists—fear to tread. Roundly is the man in the street now assured by those who most loudly claim to know, that 'no man is answerable for his own acts.'² So that courage and cowardice, selfishness and self-sacrifice, lust and purity, are all one and the same, viz. the mathematically prearranged performances of a two-

¹ *Ideals of Science and Faith*, p. 169.

² *Not Guilty*, by R. Blatchford, p. 10.

legged machine, possessed of a consciousness which deludes him with the notion that he is free. In such case, plainly, morality is at an end. 'The sooner we get rid of the notion of moral responsibility the better,' says the author of a virulent attack on everything Christian, which has been for some time flung through the land at cheapest price.¹ And he does but echo the deliberate conclusion of the Continental Professor: 'To-day it must suffice us to have shown that there is no such thing as moral responsibility, and that all men are irresponsible.'² We have noted, moreover, on a former page, the proclamation of *The Clarion*, that 'there are no good men, and there are no bad, there are only sick and well, fortunate and unfortunate.' Whence, assuredly, it follows that there is no right and there is no wrong. There is only that which happens because it could not be otherwise. Thus exit morality. What, then, can rust and smut do for the fairest cornfield, that this 'new philosophy' does not do for humanity? Mercifully for society, these philosophers freely contradict themselves, both in theory and practice, so that the blight is greatly reduced in effect. There are no practical 'Determinists.'

But the unbelief which is less rash is sometimes more effective. The appeal of Christianity, as we

¹ *The Service of Man*, by Cotter Morison, p. III.

² *The Illusion of Free-will*, by A. Hamon, p. 138.

have seen, is not to the senses, but the soul ; not to mere strength of intellect, but to that finer sense and deeper sensitiveness which we call the heart. It is here that the consciousness of moral wrong becomes burdensome, and consequently the most potent restraints are felt. What becomes of this under the régime of unbelief? In some cases it disappears altogether. 'Man can no more sin against God than a steam engine can sin against the engineer who built it.'¹ If this is not the extinction of manhood, what is? In other cases a blurred and blunted sense of right and wrong is left. It is, however, as far below the standard of the Christian ideal set forth in the doctrine and example of Jesus, as the manners of the rustic clown are below the self-forgetting courtesy of the true gentleman. Professor Seeley has expressed this with never-to-be-forgotten lucidity.

'Among all the men of the ancient world there were scarcely one or two, if any, to whom we might venture to apply the epithet "holy." Probably no one will deny that in Christian countries this higher-toned goodness which we call holiness has existed. Few will maintain that it has been exceedingly rare.'²

But when Christianity is dismissed, this ideal of character, 'which not only abstains from vice, but regards even a vicious thought with horror,' is

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, p. 19.

² *Ecce Homo*, Eversley Edition, p. 192.

gone with it. Nor is there anything in science, philosophy, art, ethics, or all combined, to take its place.

The lowered standard is felt next, after the inner world of thought and feeling, in the home. No honest observer denies that there may be bright homes, and real human loves, without any thought of the grace of God as expressed in Jesus Christ. But whatever this non-Christian love may be, real, good, pure, practical, its Christianization means its enlargement, its deepening, its intensification, its purification, its hallowing, as undeniably as indefinitely. Far be it from us to cast slight upon the joys of any genuine human home. But be these as sweet as they may, this is 'extra':

O happy home, where each one serves Thee lowly,
 Whatever his appointed work may be;
 Till every common task seems great and holy,
 When it is done, O Lord, as unto Thee.

O happy home, where Thou art not forgotten
 When joy is overflowing, full and free;

O happy home, where every wounded spirit
 Is brought, Physician, Comforter, to Thee.

It was the loss of that extra which gave to Dr. Romanes his 'sharpest pang' of grief. In every genuinely Christian home it is that extra, unseen may be, unspoken, unproclaimed, but real as the fragrance of the early morning, and potent as the dynamo's invisible current, which makes a daily heaven, and the loss of which would be incalculable.

But the tender depth of Christian sanctions is no sign of weakness. The true disciple has not merely doctrine to appreciate, and example to follow, but law to obey. 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' is as an ideal sweet enough to charm the poet and broad enough to satisfy the Socialist. Yet in all cases save the Christian, it must be left optional. And in that looseness it is largely lost. But for the Christian it is not optional. It is so obligatory that—to reverse Paul's axiom¹—he that in these things does not serve Christ, is rejected of God and disowned of men. It is optional to any man, whether he will become Christian or not. But when a man has chosen to follow Christ, his choice ends. He is thenceforth under law, even under the severest law of all, the law of loving allegiance. He moves under it indeed 'as light as carrier birds in air,' but the lark is under law even more fully than the caterpillar. The loosening of that 'law of Christ' is the dry-rot of the Church. The loss of such law is the tragedy of the world. What shame, what cruelty, what injustice, what hot-blooded war, what cold-blooded sweating, what passionate lust, what selfish greed, would remain, if 'the law of Christ' instead of being whittled away by criticism, or treated as a dead letter by conventionalism, or trampled under foot by Secularism, were enforced

¹ Rom. xiv. 18.

as the universal rule of civilization? Macaulay's words become none too strong hereupon :

' I speak merely as a politician, anxious for the morality and well-being of society, and so speaking I say that to denounce the religion which has done so much to promote justice and mercy and arts and sciences and good government and domestic happiness, which has struck off the chains of the slave, mitigated the horrors of war, and raised women from being mere playthings into companions and friends, is to commit high treason against humanity and civilization.'

Those who question or deny such an estimate have to answer one of their own most prominent champions. For in his recent popular and virulent onslaught on Christian faith this writer, out of the very midst of his wrath against the many wrongs and shames of to-day, openly declares that ' It is very evident that our common English ideals are *anti-Christian* and that our commercial, foreign, and social affairs are run on *anti-Christian* lines.' ¹ Mark the term we here italicize. If that be true, what logic can be so simple or unanswerable as the plain deduction that, to right all the wrongs, and end all the evils denounced, we have only to get rid of the ' anti—,' and emphasize the Christian? Instead of which, this writer utterly contradicts

¹ *God and My Neighbour*, by R. Blatchford, p. ix.

himself in attempting to get rid of the Christian and establish the 'anti—.'

Elsewhere the same energetic propagandist of Socialism tells us, with all possible emphasis, that Altruism means 'Christ's glorious gospel of love,' and that 'Altruism, indeed, is more important than Socialism itself. Given universal love of man for man, and we should have something better than Socialism itself.'¹ But that is Christianity. And let cynical watchers find what faults they may in its imperfect professors, the main principles of the gospel of Christ are such as to supply the very strongest motives for that personal unselfishness which constitutes the aroma of private life, and the mightiest impulses towards that unlimited Altruism which is the future hope of the world. The real brotherhood of men requires the real Fatherhood of God, alike to justify it in thought and to dynamize it in practice.

The largest-hearted philanthropist, however, has not seldom to carry 'his own load' of pain and sorrow. It is one of the bitterest of commonplaces that genuine piety appears to bring no exemption from the mystery of illness, sorrow, calamity, bereavement. Every age has its Job; every generation adds names unknown to the tragic list of the writer to the Hebrews. Christians did not in the least need the coarse sneer

¹ *Altruism, &c.*, p. 6.

of Haeckel concerning the premature death of Heinrich Herz, to bring home to them the present weight of sorrow's mystery.

The tragedy of Henry Drummond's unexpected and unexplained removal from our midst, when such as he are wanted more than ever, is but typical, we know, of unnumbered instances where sight is lost and doctrine is dumb. But whether we think of our own secret wounds that time does not heal, or mind and heart go out together to face the bewilderment of innocent suffering in the history of humanity, this much is certain, that if Christ's words of comfort and hope be snatched from us, there are none to take their place. Some advocates of unfaith are disposed to resent such a note of Agnostic despair. But they give us nothing else. Some, on the other hand, openly acknowledge it. The latest confession, given on a preceding page,¹ could be only too easily repeated from other sources. The very best, indeed, that reverent Agnosticism has to offer us is such as this :

‘The imperfect and uncertain knowledge possessed by man of the infinitely little piece of space and time within his ken—a knowledge which Carlyle compared to the knowledge that a minnow has of his creek—is quite insufficient to tell us whether good or evil preponderates in the infinite ocean of space and the infinite year of time.’

¹ See pp. 115, 170.

Poor comfort that, for the mind and heart which can neither let the problems of the universe alone, nor find any clue to their solution! We talk of 'blighted lives' with bated breath; but if this be all that humanity can hope to find at the end of its weary and oft tearful quest, how can any life on earth be other than blighted? The question, 'How much is a man of more value than a sheep?' becomes worse than meaningless. It should rather be, in tones of profoundest pity, 'How much worse?'

Out of this helpless hopelessness has arisen, to great extent, the modern justification of suicide, and glorification of extinction under the pitiful pseudonym of an 'endless rest.' It is no doubt true that the vagaries of Spiritism and the uncertainties of philosophy, even when reinforced with the suggestions of psychical research, give us but muffled hints as to realities after death. But their insufficiency no more quenches the normal human cry for life's continuance, than the passing of a ship in sight satisfies the poor wrecked watchers on a raft. It may be said that all men are not wrecked. But even if we here leave out of account the lives that are plainly moral wrecks, we must ask concerning the others, can there be any wreck more real than the shipwreck of faith? For what it means is that, through many a storm and many a calm, a man feels himself to be the captain of

his soul, and bravely makes his way through life in spite of cyclones and sunken rocks towards a worthy haven, only to find himself at last foundering in a resistless maelstrom that sucks him down to a bottomless abyss. 'As to death,' says Mr. Meredith, 'any one who understands nature at all, thinks nothing of it.' With all respect, one must much more truly say that any one who understands human nature at all, thinks everything of it. And shame upon his humanity if he does not! There is no mockery at once more cruel and deceitful than to tell the human soul—

Who loved, who suffered countless ills,
Who battled for the true, the just—

that he should thankfully look forward to annihilation as his peaceful rest. His soul vomits forth the insult with unutterable scorn. The ancient seer wrote, 'Better is a living dog than a dead lion.' Its translation into the deeper thought of humanity becomes 'better self-consciousness in hell, than the appalling figment of an unconscious heaven.' That apotheosis of extinction, if it were inevitable, would be indeed the blight of blights on all our human best, just in proportion to the pathetic eagerness of humanity's quest for the Holy Grail in this our mortal pilgrimage.

When all this loss is summed up into its

dreary total, it is as indescribable as a dense sea-fog—and as dire a reason for dread. The unspeakable longing of the captain of a modern liner, with his burdening sense of responsibility for a living freight, to escape from the risks of impenetrable murkiness into the clear light of day, is a true figure of the yearning of the human heart to get away from the chilling and blinding mists of unbelief, into ‘the light that never was on sea or land’ radiating from the living Christ. Such escape from blight to bloom can scarcely be better expressed than thus :

O Thou who art of all that is
Beginning both and end,
We follow Thee through unknown paths,
Since all to Thee must tend :
Thy judgements are a mighty deep
Beyond all fathom-line ;
Our wisdom is the childlike heart,
Our strength to trust in Thine.

We bless Thee for the skies above,
And for the earth beneath,
For hopes that blossom here below
And wither not with death ;
But most we bless Thee for Thyself,
O heavenly Light within ;
Whose dayspring in our hearts dispel
The darkness of our sin.

Be Thou in joy our deeper joy,
Our comfort when distressed ;
Be Thou by day our strength for toil,
And Thou by night our rest.

And when these earthly dwellings fail
 And time's last hour is come,
 Be Thou, O God, our dwelling-place
 And our eternal home.¹

4. The reality and seriousness, therefore, of the blight of unbelief being unmistakable, it only remains to ask what can be done to prevent or cure it. This is what modern science sets itself to discover, when some minute fungus or insect threatens to turn the golden corn into a desert of straw. Can nothing be done to save the richer harvest of faith and hope and love, with the consequent 'fruit of the Spirit,' from the mildew of doubt, or the killing frost of anti-Christian denial?

Certainly it must be understood, without demur or hesitation, that the Christian quite agrees with Strauss when he asks at the close of his pathetic lament, 'But what is the use of having recourse to an illusion?' No one in the name of Christian faith for a moment suggests that the beautiful is necessarily the true, or that we are warranted in believing anything because we wish it to be true. Christ's word is: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' That is the everlasting watchword of valid belief.

But truth is often delicate as well as precious, and needs to be not only discovered, but appre-

¹ F. L. Hosmer, see Hymn 413, Methodist Hymn-Book.

ciated and protected. It is so with all the most beautiful flowers and valuable fruit. The preservation and protection of these, we know, require at least three kinds of effort. Attention must be given to the root ; conditions suitable for development must be arranged ; actual manifestations of disease must be thoroughly taken in hand. Processes analogous to these are no less necessary and effective for the preservation and growth of all that is precious and helpful in the Christian faith.

(i) Attention to the *root* refers us at once to those sacred secrecies of mind and heart where real conviction is born and ripens. For such a result there is, of course, no cheap and easy recipe. Faith must become ever more, not less, thoughtful in the midst of advancing knowledge. Sir Oliver Lodge's protest, quoted on a preceding page,¹ is really so true and timely as to merit repetition. 'There are few things which Christ would have visited with sterner censure, than that short cut to belief which consists in abandonment of mental effort.' The pearl of great price is not to be won lightly in a careless scramble. In this respect we endorse Spinoza's dictum that 'all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare,' quite as earnestly as we repudiate Professor McTaggart's use of it in putting him above Jesus Christ.² This is not

¹ See p. 21.

² *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 299.

the place to show the superiority of Jesus, though it might well appear in the fact that He not merely calls upon every man for his best, but opens an honest door for the weakest and humblest who, if they had only syllogisms to look to, would be lost indeed. Speaking now for the average man, two things may suffice. First, the plain assertion, carefully made, that no sufficient reasons have yet been furnished for the forsaking of that modern Evangelicalism which is here contemplated. And secondly, that protections from error and guides to truth are plentifully at hand for those who are willing to employ them. These may not convince opponents; they may be of differing worth for differing temperaments; but they are sufficient to endorse the process and secure the result expressed in *In Memoriam* :

. . . One indeed I knew
 In many a subtle question versed,
 Who touched a jarring lyre at first,
 But ever strove to make it true.

He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
 He would not make his judgement blind,
 He faced the spectres of the mind
 And laid them. Thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
 And power was with him in the night
 That makes the darkness and the light,
 And dwells not in the light alone.

(ii) The chief region where most may be done and most needs to be done to secure the *conditions* for genuine Christian faith, is undoubtedly the home. It is too great, too precious, too potent an opportunity, to be worthily sketched in a few sentences. Genuinely Christian homes tend more to make reliable Christian faith than any other influence on earth. It may be difficult, even where the parents are sincere in their belief, to practise the happy medium between Puritan severity and worldly laxity. Draconian harshness in the name of Jesus is no doubt as hardening in influence as inconsistent in essence. But it is more than probable that a far greater number of children have gone astray from Christian homes through Laodicean carelessness in training. When family prayer is unknown ; when Sunday worship is regarded merely as an irksome duty once a day ; whilst every day refined selfishness goes unrebuked, and loose company is treated as of no importance ; when superficial reading is no more a matter for concern than the substitution of current slang for the sweet dignity of Christian speech,—it is little wonder, under these circumstances, that the modern environment soon withers up the feeble faith which grows into but a sickly plant. The opposite course is, as Spinoza hints, both difficult and rare, but it is correspondingly precious and powerful.

(iii) Actual dealing with the *effects* of the modern atmosphere, on the needed scale, naturally transports us into the realm of public duty such as all officials in Christian churches are called upon to share. The one thing which can or need here be said in this regard, is that the churches as thus represented have long been and still are inclined to take their work too easily. Few things are easier than ordinary preaching, just as few are more difficult than effective teaching. We read concerning Jesus often that 'He went up into the temple and taught.' Alas! that can only be said of a minority of His modern representatives. In some cases—would that they were few—'sermons' have become such pitiful travesties of Christian reality, that the average man does not stoop to notice them. In many other cases they are as feeble in their contributions to enlightenment as well-meant in their intention to warm. When cynicism is laid aside, there may be found undoubtedly much good in the numberless efforts of the churches to preserve and produce Christian belief. But it must be said plainly, without fear or favour, that they are not nearly good enough for the coming age. Whether we think of sermons or lectures, classes or open conferences, Sunday schools or large assemblies, mere orthodox repetition and clerical assumption have had their day. Unless such methods are reinforced with

more thoughtful and practical adaptation to the modern environment, no amount of rhetoric or emotion whatever will prevent their ceasing to be. Controversy, as such, may well be reduced to the inevitable minimum, but guidance there must be. It need not be cold, but it must be informing and stimulating. The enforcement of spiritual truths must be up to date in everything that bears upon the higher life, as surely as mental education is compelled to be in touch with every latest development of knowledge.

All this, and all else that is manifestly involved in it, some may say, is but a counsel of perfection, a mere Utopian dream. The only truth in such reply is that the way to the highest is never smooth. In the Master's words, 'He that doth not take up his cross daily, and follow Me, cannot be My disciple.' There is nothing impossible in the confessedly severe demands now pressing upon Christian believers. Whether he be an official or not, every man can contribute his *best*. *But it is precisely this that is so often lacking.* Thousands of avowed Christians, lay and clerical alike, fail here. The greatest heresy in modern Christendom is that myriads in the churches are very far indeed from doing their best. The name of the hindrances is Legion. Sometimes superficiality and carelessness, sometimes selfishness and in-

dolence, sometimes hollow customs and conventions, sometimes stimulants and narcotics—which ever it be, all such failures from the best assuredly do not make for efficiency in the modern teaching and practice of the mind of Jesus Christ. Most truly does the parable speak of the Kingdom of Heaven as ‘hid treasure,’ only to be obtained when the finder ‘sells all that he has’ to purchase it. The metaphor is quite transparent, and easily admits translation into present-day circumstances when mind and heart are ready. But only those who have paid and are glad to pay some such ‘great price’ for their faith, are likely to spend themselves in protecting it from blight or promoting its growth throughout human society.

It may be that in this case, as with so many other of life’s benedictions, the worth of Christian faith can only be fully revealed by its loss. Perhaps the threat that the Christian hope shall be taken from us, may awaken some to a keener appreciation of it, and a proportionately stronger desire to save it from nemesis and one’s fellows from the ensuing chaos.

This at least is sure, that the contrast between the heart-wrung groan of Strauss or the pathetic lament of Romanes, with the unuttered grief of many more who feel slippery ground beneath them where they would fain stand firm, and a genuine indefeasible share in the apostle’s con-

fidence—‘ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit ’—is worth all the cost in mind and heart, in quest of truth and conquest of self, which any human being has ever paid for it, or ever will. And that which is true for the individual soul, is true for humanity at large.

IX

THE BLESSED LIFE

O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.

PS. xxxiv. 8.

If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them.

JOHN xiii. 17, MATT. v. 3-11.

As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

COL. ii. 6, 7.

THE inevitable paradox of our human life is that it ever shortens whilst it lengthens. Full well we all know that the experience of every week means that there is one week less to come. We sit each one upon our branch of life's great tree, compelled to saw away daily at our connexion with the main trunk. Whenever we choose to think of it, we plainly see that ere long the crash of the fall must come. Is such a life worth having? When the babe is born it simply begins to die, and the process at longest is but short. Is such a tiny span of being boon or bane? Were it not better never to be at all, than simply to pass out of one darkness through a mere flash of consciousness into another?

No modern pessimist can ask such questions more keenly, or answer them more cynically, than the ancient writer of Ecclesiastes. But the modern cynic at least does not end as did the ancient. He gets no farther than 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' It is 'the conclusion of the whole matter' which makes all the difference. The one view does indeed betoken a stormy passage across life's ocean, amidst blinding hurricanes and torturing fogs, but the harbour is made in the end, and—

When the shore is won at last
Who will count the billows past?

In the other case there is no harbour to make. We 'are of no more value to the universe at large,' reiterates the latter-day critic, 'than the fly of a summer's day or the smallest bacillus.' So it is not an ocean that is being traversed with home in view, but a whirlpool in which we are being resistlessly sucked down into extinction. Verily it is small wonder that in such case the estimate of life's value should dwindle until it becomes a vanishing quantity. Of what avail that 'many run to and fro and knowledge is increased,' if the final total of result is that 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow'? The intensified sensitiveness of high civilization simply writhes under the burden of the daily tale of

calamity and crime. So enters now the woe of the world into every heart, and the cheerfulness of our fathers' ignorance is sunk in the depression of our boundless information.

Truly there is growing need for such an evangel as Paul proclaimed. Let us hear it again. 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.' Unless this ideal be but pious delusion based upon historic falsehood, it represents the greatest benediction that can possibly come to poor humanity. Christianity stands for the assurance that it is a present reality, based upon eternal truth, and declares it to be the embodiment of the life which all men might live and ought to live. For Christian philosophy, this is the ideal human world which it is the whole purpose of the love of God to bring to pass. By way of making it clear and vivid, let us view the whole of this bright vision as it may be focused in one incandescent word. Christ took it, we know, from the older faith in which He was brought up, but He recoined it and stamped it with a significance unprecedented then and unparalleled since. Ten times over in the very forefront of His message to men He pronounced those who truly followed Him, 'blessed,' and the writings of those who knew Him best echo it a hundred-fold. There is indeed no other term that can hold all His

gospel, even as for such a word there is neither place nor use in other religions or philosophies. The lofty reflections of Marcus Aurelius make no more mention of it¹ than the philanthropic pleadings of *The Clarion*. But the Christian poet² beautifully expresses its true significance :

O blessed life—heart, mind and soul,
From self-born aims and wishes free,
In all at³ one with Deity,
And loyal to the Lord's control.

Human life happily may take on many beautiful hues, but as the colours of the rainbow are all blended in the light of day, so are all the noblest possibilities of human nature gathered up in the life which Christ pronounces 'blessed.' Once only has all that it connotes been made clear in the world's history, even in His own case : when

. . . the Word had breath, and wrought,
With human hands, the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought.

But that vision never has been nor ever can be forgotten. The unanimous testimony of humanity's best thought and feeling through all the ages

¹ 'Wide is the gulf that lies between Stoic Pantheism and belief in the incarnate Christ.'—*Marcus Aurelius Antoninus to Himself*, by Dr. Rendall, p. xvii.

² W. Tidd Matson.

following, has been and yet is that the 'blessed' life, above all others, was lived in Palestine some nineteen centuries ago, by One who called Himself the Son of Man.

Yet with equal tenderness and severity He ever made it clear that what He sought was not admiration, but repetition ; that the real purpose of His whole life of struggle and His anguish in death, was that men should learn the secret of His blessedness, and incarnate it here and now in themselves. He gave us glimpses, truly, not many nor clear but certain, concerning another life beyond the grave. Yet He made it unmistakable that the 'eternal life' of which He spoke was a matter of quality not quantity, that heaven to come differs only in degree from heaven now, and that the blessed life on earth is the true and only training for the yet more blessed life to come.

Wherein then does this blessedness consist, and how can we who call ourselves Christians justify it to ourselves and our generation, as the supreme human ideal? Men have many conceptions of happiness, many philosophies, many religions ; wherein does the Christian idea of the blessed life show its superiority? What is the gain if we turn from our own natural tastes, from the pleasing customs of society, from the maxims of ordinary humanity, to this discipleship of Jesus Christ?

Nothing can be of greater import than a true and clear answer to such inquiry.

So far as the words of the New Testament are concerned, it would perhaps be difficult to find a more comprehensive statement than this, taken from Paul's letter to the Colossians: 'As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.' Without treating this sentence as the text upon which to found a sermon, we cannot help seeing that its suggestion is personally too intense and ethically too extensive to be summarized as simply meaning a good life, or a happy, useful, or noble life. No one of these terms, nor yet their sum, covers the whole ground. But the 'blessed' life does; because it vividly includes all these, and a great deal more. It is just this 'more' which is the very essence of the whole matter. It may be difficult for the average Christian to answer Christ's testing question as to real discipleship—'What *extra* do ye?'¹ Yet He unmistakably insists upon it.² To begin to live the blessed life is to 'enter into the Kingdom of

¹ Matt. v. 47. That this is the true as well as forceful rendering of *τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε*, the present writer first pointed out many years ago in his *Mission of Christianity*, Part IV.

² 'Unless your goodness shall exceed the goodness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye will in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven' (v. 20). The rest of the chapter explains 'exceed.'

Heaven.' The two phrases stand both for the same reality, and the essence of that reality is superiority. The blessed life is, in a word, the embodiment of the Christian *extra*. Let us briefly note wherein.

It may be taken for granted, without argument, that every human life which can in any degree be deemed worth living, must involve some measure of goodness and happiness, as also of peace, strength, hope, philanthropy. Without these, human life becomes mere animal existence, unworthy of consideration from the moral standpoint. As a matter of fact, these noble qualities are found in average human society much more fully than evangelical theology has been wont to acknowledge. Men and women in general never were the 'moral corpses' or 'masses of corruption' which Calvinism so vehemently asserted. The difference between the truly Christian and the average non-Christian life, is not a simple contrast between good and bad, but a much more complex comparison between the partly good and the vastly better. Consider, then, in swift summary, the factors of any worthy life, and their higher counterpart in the blessed life.

As to goodness, the Christian standard never did truly involve casting a pall of contempt or denunciation upon all that is not Christian. The existence and influence of sin are too real to need any exaggeration. The false emphasis put upon

such words as 'they that are in the flesh cannot please God,'¹ was but the error of a narrow theology. Society could not have continued to exist, had it been as bad as some religionists have made out. There has been goodness immeasurable in all the ages. The difference between it and Christian goodness is in the standard of testing. Ordinary human nature measures its purity and nobility by itself; by the customs of society; by the decrees of law courts; by the maxims of current philosophy. The blessed life takes its estimate from the doctrine and spirit of Jesus. This means, as we have already noticed, a 'higher-toned goodness which we call holiness,' and applies only to those 'who, besides being virtuous in their actions are possessed with an unaffected enthusiasm of goodness, and besides abstaining from vice regard even a vicious thought with horror.'² Here is an ideal which ordinary ethics not only do not reach, but do not even attempt. When Jesus says 'If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them,' the test is as spiritual as practical. 'These things' include what He referred to as a pure heart; an inner life, that is, which is utterly true to both the great commands, as He interpreted and emphasized

¹ Cf. Dr. Weymouth's rendering: 'And they whose hearts are absorbed in earthly things cannot please God' (Rom. viii. 8).

² *Ecce Homo*, p. 191 (Eversley ed.).

them. How much more this means than the honesty which keeps men out of prison, and the kindness which makes daily life tolerable, no words are needed to show. The blessed life receives 'Christ Jesus as Lord'; that is the open secret of its ethical and spiritual superiority to every other life.

Again, as to happiness. The irresistible craving of human nature, especially young human nature, for brightness, must be acknowledged. The ordinary run of attempts to satisfy this craving is only too well known. Music and dances, whist drives and entertainments, sports and holidays, pictures and dresses, good company and lively songs—these and their like comprise society's fashionable recipes for happiness. Does then the blessed life frown indiscriminately on all these, and cast them out as evil? By no means. One utterance alone from the New Testament should suffice to settle that.¹ Wherein then lies the difference between social brightness and blessed brightness? In substance, and in depth. Who does not know that when once the innocent gladness which love divine plants in the child's heart is outgrown, the larger part of what 'society' pronounces happy is sheer froth, mere frivolity—the poor animal delight which finds its too real satisfaction in selfish sensationalism, or coarse

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

buffoonery, or the everlasting giggle? In what is pitifully called 'high' life, it means mornings spent in slothful indulgence, afternoons in costly dressing, and evenings in fretful wonder and peevish doubt as to whether the dressed and painted body shines more or less, in the giddy glare, than other similarly bedizened creatures. So, in innumerable ways and degrees, clownish effeminacy—even if there be nothing worse—eats away the young man's manhood, and the deep sweet tenderness which ought to be the essence of pure womanhood, is lost in silly smirking or in empty-souled flirtation. The whole is but a 'whited sepulchre.'

From all such miserable self-delusion the blessed life is free. Its gladness—as much more bright than worldly gladness as the solid incandescent lime is than the flicker of a gust-driven gas-flame—is 'rooted, and built up in Him' who never marred one pure true joy, but taught men how to deepen, intensify, and preserve all that most ministers to genuine and worthy delight. 'I am come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly,' said He, and the blessed life is the incarnation of that promise. Human nature is doubtless made to be happy, as surely as the human ear is enabled to appreciate the noblest music. But who would appreciate Beethoven or Mozart played with one hand? What were any sonata without the deeper tones, and even the

passing discords, but a failure and disappointment? So is any human delight which leaves character out of account. The blessed life is bright with the gladness that grows out of character, and so exceeds all mere sensational counterfeits as surely, and as immeasurably, as the ruddy glow of real health surpasses the rouge laid on a painted cheek.

Further, as to peace. Call it, if you will, the absence of worry. Unless there be some measure of relief from the wearing friction of the modern world, a human life must fret itself out in miserable brevity. But the blessed life teaches how to 'trust, with faith that comes of self-control,' and so makes a peace within which guarantees peace without. Its calm is not the hardness of stony stoicism, or the dullness of empty-hearted lethargy, or the despair that murmurs 'Kismet.' It is the peace of God which, because it transcends all our powers of thought, and is more potent than all our shrewdness,¹ becomes 'a garrison to guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' Who lives the blessed life, therefore, is not content to say with Mr. Henley—

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Beneath the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody—but unbowed.

Nor does he simply set his teeth in blind defiance

¹ Phil. iv. 7. Cf. Weymouth, though both senses may fairly be attached to *ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν*.

of the future. Rather, 'being grounded and renewed' in the love divine for which Christ Himself stands surety, his song runs :

In all I do I feel Thine aid,
Therefore Thy nearness will I sing,
O God who bidd'st my heart be glad
Beneath the shadow of Thy wing.

But further. Such trust means the very opposite to the weakness which some suggest as its natural consequence. On the contrary the blessed life is as strong as calm. Strength indeed there must be, somehow, if human life is to be anything better than tragedy. But the possession of power too often means mere selfishness, finding expression in roughness, coarseness, and brutality. Half the miseries of the world are traceable to such an origin. But in the blessed life there is none of this. There cannot be, seeing that it originates and is developed in Him who was not only the 'Strong Son of God,' but also 'immortal love.' The force of character developed through Him is as the hydraulic power which does such gentle but mighty service in our great works, compared with the ruin-making dynamite. Its watchword is 'Blessed are the meek.' But day is not farther from night than meekness from weakness, however commonly and foolishly society confuses them. The superior strength of the blessed life is ever seen in its blending with Christlike gentleness. It is strong enough to defy

temptation, and endure hardness, yet too gentle to hurt a little child, or despise even the veriest weakling.

Yet again, as to hope. This, we know, is largely a matter of temperament: much easier to some than to others. It is generally easiest to those who are most thoughtless. The wise and brave man may be grave with apprehension, when the foolish and ignorant are hopeful only because they are blind to realities. But to know anything of the blessed life which is 'rooted and built up' in Jesus Christ, is to develop a hopefulness which can look everything in the face, on this side of the grave or beyond. To 'abound in hope' becomes then no mere expression of a sanguine temperament, but the *extra* result of ceaseless communion with the highest. The mirror that ever faces the sun will never fail to reflect the light.

All the foregoing elements of character, it may be remarked, are personal and internal. They must be so at first; even as the little child must develop its own manhood before it can become helpful to any other. But certainly the development of the blessed life is ever from within outwards. In the very degree in which these elements of character are real and precious to himself, the man who truly knows the blessed life will long to share them with his fellows. He will never forget that it is even 'more blessed to give than to receive.' So

we find the apostle who at one moment rejoices that he has 'found the secret' of the blessedness whereby he can 'do all things,'¹ at another cries out that he has 'great sorrow and unceasing pain at his heart'² for his brethren's sake. The latter is the natural Christian development of the former.

A modern writer has said that 'There cannot be such a thing as an individualist salvation, any more than an individual righteousness. No man is saved until he is willing to be lost in the service of his kind, and there is no salvation worth talking about which does not imply becoming a Saviour.'³ There is room for such earnest words. This altruistic outlook of the blessed life has been too often overlooked, not only by the monks and nuns and hermits of bygone days who fled from the society of their fellows in order to find blessing, but in present-day 'retreats' and 'conventions,' and effusions of religious poetry which dwell only on spiritual subjectivity. But fire will cease to give either heat or light as it burns, before the blessed life will be hidden away in heart-secrecies, buried like the one talent in useless seclusion. Every man or woman who rises above carnality and custom and selfishness, into the pure brightness and calm strength of communion

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

² Rom. ix. 3.

³ *Christianity and the Social Order*, by R. J. Campbell, p. 126.

with Christ, must go on to exemplify His word, 'Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world.' Egoism is as intolerable without altruism, as altruism is impossible without egoism. In the blessed life there is no conflict between these two. Rather do they supplement and stimulate each other. The human self, by very reason of its enrichment beyond utterance through receiving Christ Jesus as Lord, cannot but share the apostle's yearning over others. It will never cease to feel, and act upon the feeling—

O that the world might taste and see
The riches of His grace !
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace.

However vain are all attempts to describe the blessed life to which Christ calls men, even as all the efforts of the best artists must fail to do justice to a sunbeam, yet enough has perhaps been said above to provoke the comment that the whole idea is Utopian. It may be beautiful in the abstract, but is beyond us in the concrete. It may be desirable, but it is none the less impossible. Let us then, finally, meet these misgivings with the careful affirmation that the blessed life here contemplated is indeed desirable beyond expression, and is at the same time not impossible.

(i) No thought can measure, no language convey, its desirability. Civilization certainly groans for

something which will 'soothe its sorrows, heal its wounds, and drive away its fears.' Hence the modern air is thick with philanthropies. The needs and sufferings, sins and sorrows of men, are calling forth more sympathetic response than ever. In a thousand ways attempts are being made, at which all Christians at least will rejoice, to cope with social problems and heal the woes of humanity. Yet it becomes ever plainer that the only radical and final remedy for human misery is in the remoulding of human character. It is a potent truth, alike for good and ill, that character is influenced by environment. But it is even more true and potent that environment is influenced by character. The elevation of individual character is an old highway to social happiness, but it is confessedly difficult, and many eager philanthropists have sought for shorter cuts. Sooner or later, however, the return has to be made to the only road. What it all comes to—let anti-Christian cynicism gibe as it may—is that *the blessed life is ultimately the only hope of humanity*. Christendom may sadly fail to teach or to exemplify this hope. But that is not the failure of Christianity. On the needed world-scale, Christianity has never yet been tried. The modern Christian, like the ancient Israelite, is continually forsaking the true God to worship idols. Hence the Church's impotence to bless the world. But if only the

profession of Christianity did mean on all hands the embodiment of the blessed life, even as here briefly outlined, full churches would be but a small fraction of the result. Much more may be affirmed, with no less truth. Even this, that the curses of civilization—which may well alarm unbelief¹—would come to an end as surely as noxious bacteria in sunlight; society would be leavened with even more certainty than yeast leavens the house-wife's dough; human sorrows would be brought to their natural and tolerable minimum; and the nations would be in such assurance of permanent peace, that the millions expended on murderous battle-ships could be utilized for the abolition of poverty and the enrichment of humanity.

Nation with nation, land with land,
Unarmed shall live as comrades free;
In every heart and brain shall throb
The pulse of one fraternity.

New arts shall bloom of loftier mould,
And mightier music thrill the skies,
And every life shall be a song,
When all the earth is Paradise.

Aye! 'When'? For answer, at least this must be affirmed, that neither education nor philanthropy, neither science nor art, neither philosophy nor politics, gives such an ideal or stimulus to its

¹ 'Social misery of all kinds spreads wider and wider, almost in proportion as civilization develops.'—Haeckel, *Wonders of Life*, bound edition, p. 446.

attainment as is found in the true significance and practical application of that blessed life which the gospel of Christ would have men live.

All that can be said against such suggestions is that they are Utopian. 'Beautiful dreams, we are told, 'no more.' But why no more? Christianity is bound to challenge such despair. For there is nothing here that is really impossible to any man who will. It is undoubtedly true, for men and nations alike, that life is largely if not wholly made up of habits. The blessed life, whether on the large or small scale, is certainly a question of blessed habit. But this is not the whole case. Destiny, we know, turns on character, just as character is decided by habits. But habits are neither more nor less than the repetition of acts. Let the first act be worthy, then let repetition confirm it, and habit becomes not only easy but the sure prophecy of destiny. In the apostle's words quoted for our guidance here, the three stages stand out with vivid clearness. The true beginning of the blessed life is plain, viz. to receive Christ Jesus as Lord. The repetition of that supreme act of the soul as each day dawns and throughout all the duties it brings, is the pledge of the habit which makes character. That character not only ensures destiny, but contributes in the interim to other characters and destinies on every hand. Let

modern Socialism be taken—as it deserves to be—at its best and utmost, it yields no hope of any golden age without purified and ennobled individual character. For that, there is no such ideal nor guarantee on earth as the blessed life which is ‘rooted and built up’ in Jesus Christ.

Here, as so often, it is plainly the first step which counts—and costs. And here too, external help is but little available. Priesthood is unthinkable. Preaching is nothing more than suggestion. Sermons and homilies are but finger-posts, not vehicles, upon the road. Services are only shells which may or may not contain a kernel. The kernel, the very heart of the whole, the true beginning without which the consequence can never follow, is a personal relation to a Person. That is the very first breath of the blessed life. And all that comes after is but the perpetuation of that by repetition, even as also physically we live by repeating the first act of breathing with which we entered into mortal life. But no one, however near and dear, can breathe for us. Each must draw in every moment’s supply of air for himself, as long as he lives. It is no less true of the blessed life.

In final summary, then, we must reiterate that the worth of humanity’s existence depends upon the character of human society. No worthier human ideal is conceivable than the greatest

blessedness of the greatest number. But whether this shall ever come to pass in fact, or shall remain nothing more than a pious phantasy and an ethical Utopia, depends ultimately and necessarily upon individual character. Such actual 'coming of Christ' in His Kingdom, cannot but depend upon the number of those who form the character and live the life which in all its sweetness and fullness and potency is summed up in His own word: 'If ye know these things, *blessed* are ye if ye do them.' How far heredity and environment here may help or hinder, is confessedly a grave question. But so long as manhood and womanhood remain, there is ultimately no reason save in our own self, our own will, our own soul, why each of us should not 'receive Christ Jesus as Lord,' and in ratifying that reception day by day prove true His assurance: 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.' He who thus truly lives the blessed life walks 'in the light even as He is in the light' until the dawning of the everlasting day. Why, therefore, should not the prayer of every one who bears the Christian name be?—

O Life, how blessed, how divine!
High Life, the earnest of a higher.
Saviour, fulfil my deep desire,
And let this blessed Life be mine.

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